

STORY LIGHT TUCHIHI

ILLUS. Saori Toyota

6

THE HERO IS
OVERPOWERED
BUT
OVERLY CAUTIOUS

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



“From
now on,
you’re
going
to be
helping me
train until
I reach
max level.
Sleeping and
eating are both
wastes of time,
so we’ll keep
those to a
minimum.”

“B-BUT...!”



**ROSALIE
ROSEGUARD**

The former empress
of the nation of Roseguard
who has joined forces
with the demons.

**CHAOS
MACHINA**

One of the four generals
of the late Demon Lord
who has joined forces
with the humans.

**SEIYA
RYUUGUIN**

The overly cautious Hero
summoned by Rista.

DUEPORTA

Unoporta's brother,
who attends the lord
of the underworld.

HATHIES

The Lord of the
Underworld who always
wears a devilish grin.

UNOPORTA

Dueporta's sister,
who attends the lord
of the underworld.

RISTARTE

The Goddess of Healing
who summoned Seiya to
save the warped world
of Gaeabrande.

CERCEUS

The musclebound God of
Swords who helps Seiya train
at Aria's request.



**“Frigid
restraints:
Fenrir Beat.”**

**AT LAST!
Seiya vs. the legendary monster
Lucifer Crowe!**

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LIGHT TUCHIHI

ILLUS.

SAORI TOYOTA

6

YEN
ON
NEW YORK

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TRANSLATION BY MATT RUTSOHN

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KONO YUSHA GA ORE TUEEE KUSENI SHINCHO SUGIRU Vol. 6

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First published in Japan in 2019 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

English translation rights arranged with KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo, through TUTTLE-MORI AGENCY, INC., Tokyo.

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Yen On

150 West 30th Street, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10001

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First Yen On Edition: March 2021

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Names: Tuchihi, Light, author. | Toyota, Saori, illustrator. | Rutsohn, Matt, translator.

Title: The hero is overpowered but overly cautious / Light Tuchihi ; illustration by Saori Toyota ; translation by Matt Rutsohn ; cover art by Saori Toyota.

Other titles: Kono yuusha ga ore tueee kuse ni shinchou sugiru. English
Description: First Yen On edition. | New York : Yen On, 2019— Identifiers: LCCN 2019013049 | ISBN 9781975356880 (v. 1 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975356903 (v. 2 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975356927 (v. 3 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975356941 (v. 4 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975315757 (v. 5 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975322021 (v. 6 ; pbk.)
Subjects: GSAFD: Fantasy fiction.

Classification: LCC PL876.U34 K5613 2019 | DDC 895.63/6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019013049>

ISBNs: 978-1-97532202-1 (paperback)

978-1-9753-2203-8 (ebook)

E3-20210224-JV-NF-ORI

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The Divine Cup

I find myself in Great Goddess Ishtar's room within the sanctuary of the unified spirit world. She gently smiles at me with her kind, wrinkled face.

"Ristarte, allow me to congratulate you on saving the parallel world of Kwarna."

"It was nothing! It was only a D-ranked world, after all."

"Even so, what you are doing is quite impressive. You have saved countless parallel worlds one after another in a very short period of time."

After a bashful chuckle, I ask:

"So, um... Any news on Mersais?"

"I have been keeping an eye out for her ever since your incident, but she still hasn't made a move. I believe you have nothing to worry about."

"Y-yeah, I guess you're right..."

After a brief bow, I retire from Great Goddess Ishtar's room. While walking through the sanctuary, I think back to that day.

...Both the Hero Seiya Ryuuguuin and I were forced to face an extremely cruel reality when we saved the parallel world Ixphoria, for it was the world Seiya was unable to save once before, as well as my home before I was reincarnated as a goddess. The Demon Lord brought ruin to Ixphoria, transforming it into a world of monsters. But even so, Seiya, who turned his regrets of his old reckless self into extreme cautiousness, thoroughly prepared and defeated every enemy he encountered. However, during the final battle against the Demon Lord, we learned that the killing machine Kiriko possessed the soul of our lost child, and that if the Demon Lord died, she would perish as well. Nevertheless, Seiya defeated him, and we saved Ixphoria. The lesson learned was no matter how much you prepare and no matter how careful you are, some things simply

cannot be saved.

After the Supreme Deity, Brahma, sent Seiya back to his world against his will, I spent the next few days on pins and needles because of Seiya's warning. We learned that there was a fallen goddess who was cast out of the spirit world, supposedly ruling Ixphoria from the shadows: the Goddess of Atrocity, Mersais. I was on edge, worrying that each day would be the one when she would finally make her move. But no matter how many days went by, there were no signs of her arrival, and the spirit world was as peaceful as ever.

When I actually stopped to think about it, I realized that Brahma had a point. The spirit world has deities such as Ishtar, who can see into the future; the Goddess of Destruction, Valkyrie; and even Chronoa, who can manipulate time. I can't imagine how anyone could get past such an ironclad defense.

My anxiety faded over time, and today, I've been given a mission to save a parallel world. Now that I'm a high-ranking goddess, I can choose whether or not I want to accept such a mission, but after some hesitation, I decide to do it. After all, my mind has been plagued with a distrust for Brahma along with a sense of loss over Kiriko. Because my mind has been a roiling sea of troublesome thoughts, I figure the best way to distract myself would be with work. Plus...

"Ristarte, the God of Creation, Brahma, asked me to give this to you."

"Th-this is...!"

The messenger of the innermost plane hands me a summoning list with Seiya's name on it.

I can see Seiya again!

"I am going to save this new parallel world no matter what it takes!"

After accepting the mission, I stare fixedly at Seiya's status when...

"Huh...?"

I notice something aggravating written in the remarks column at the bottom of the list.

You are permitted to summon your Hero with his previous memories, but

only to save S-ranked worlds or higher.

“Wh-wh-what the hell?!”

The world I said I would save was an E-ranked world, so I can't summon Seiya. It's beyond infuriating. I feel like Brahma played me, but it's too late to do anything about it. Therefore, I reluctantly summon some run-of-the-mill Hero and save the world I was assigned.

...After that, I continue to take on a few missions to save other parallel worlds, but each one of them is ranked D or lower. I beg Ishtar for an S-ranked world or higher, but there aren't that many extremely high-level worlds to begin with. Including Kwarna, I end up saving three without getting the chance to see Seiya even once.

I leave the sanctuary and head to the café run by the Divine Blade, Cerceus. The usual customers are sitting at the garden table outside.

“Welcome back! You sure have been working hard, Rista!”

“Y-you saved a-another parallel world? A-amazing.”

The Goddess of the Seal, Ariadoa, who is like an older sister to me, and the Goddess of War, Adenela, who isn't the most confident speaker, greet me as I approach them. I take a seat in the chair they offer me and bashfully grin.

“Ha-ha-ha. Yeah, I just can't sit still lately.”

I suddenly hear a deep voice coming from behind me.

“Ever since you became a high-ranking goddess, you're like a completely different person.”

Standing behind me is Cerceus, handing me a cup of tea. Despite his extremely muscular appearance, he is a timid deity, and although he is the God of Swords, he is currently more focused on running his café than studying the blade... Yeah, I know. It sounds like a bad joke. I look up at him with an irked expression.

“Now that I think about it, why aren't *you* summoning Heroes?”

“Because baking cakes is way more fun!”

I heave an incredulous sigh at his resolute reply.

“I wonder sometimes how you were able to reincarnate as a god.”

“Obviously, I must have been a master of martial arts who did countless good deeds in his past life!”

His words are dripping with confidence, but Aria, Adenela, and I still have our doubts.

“I-it is s-strange. I-in what scenario would g-garbage like Cerceus attain g-godhood?”

“...?! Could you not refer to me as garbage?! Especially when you’re drinking tea at my café!”

“Hey, um...Aria? There are only two ways for humans to reincarnate as deities, right? They either get recognized for the great deeds done in their past life or they receive an endorsement from a high-ranking deity.”

Incidentally, I apparently became a goddess thanks to Aria’s glowing recommendation. Aria places her teacup on the table and turns her attention to me.

“Actually, there is one other way for humans to become deities.”

“What?! Really? How?”

“The Divine Cup.”

“Th-the Divine Cup... N-now that you mmention it, it’s r-right around the corner, h-huh?”

Adenela mutters before looking at Cerceus with reproach.

“B-but there’s no way th-this idiot was a H-Hero and won th-the Divine Cup when he w-was a human. L-looks like Cerceus’s o-origin is s-still a mystery.”

“Ack...!”

Cerceus grunts. His backstory aside, I’ve had a question mark over my head for some time now.

“Hey, um... What’s this ‘Divine Cup’?”

Cerceus immediately looks at me like I'm an idiot.

"Rista, you seriously don't know what the Divine Cup is?"

"W-well, excuse me!"

"Rista was only reborn around a hundred years ago, so it's no surprise that she doesn't know. The Divine Cup is held once every thousand years in the spirit world. It's a tournament where Heroes who have saved parallel worlds of extreme difficulty can make a name for themselves and battle for the right to become a deity."

"Whoa. I had no idea something like that even existed!"

In short, the Hero that emerges victorious can become a god. Cerceus amusingly says: "It's basically just an event for deities to have some fun while searching for the strongest Hero of the past one thousand years!"

The strongest Hero of the past millennium...

Well, the Cup has my attention now. Aria smiles at me.

"But you know how greatly the flow of time in the spirit world differs from that of the human realm. Though here the event takes place once every thousand years, that's equal to once every ten years there. Incidentally, only those who have saved an A-ranked parallel world or higher are eligible to participate, and they must wish to reincarnate as a deity after death. Also, Heroes who participate in the Divine Cup are allowed to keep their memories and attributes when they are summoned."

Adenela pokes Aria with her elbow.

"A-Aria, your H-Hero's going to p-participate, right?"

"Yes, she is already signed up for next week's Cup."

"Wait! Seriously?!"

I suddenly realize something as I scream.

"H-hold on! Doesn't this mean I can summon Seiya, too?! I mean, we *did* save two worlds already that were both S-rank or higher! He should be eligible!"

I'll finally be reunited with Seiya! My heart flutters as I pull out the Hero

summoning list.

“Wh-whaaaaaat?!”

As if the list had been listening to our conversation, I find a new rule written under Seiya’s name.

Seiya Ryuuguuin shall not be permitted to participate in the Divine Cup. Reason: Though he meets the requirements, he has no intention of becoming a deity.

“Noooooo!”

I sigh deeply in disappointment. B-but, well, he did turn Brahma down when he was offered the opportunity to become a god. Nevertheless, I couldn’t mask my frustration.

“*Sigh...* I can’t believe someone as talented as Seiya isn’t going to be able to participate in a tournament to decide the strongest Hero...”

Adenela suddenly nods.

“S-Seiya would have d-definitely won.”

“Right?! He would have smoked the competition!”

It happens right as I raise my voice. *Squish, squish, squish.* I suddenly feel an odd sensation on my chest.

“...Hm?”

When I lower my gaze, I notice someone’s hands latching onto my breasts from behind!

“Eeeeeeeeeek!”

I turn my head to see a goddess, completely naked save the chains covering her crucial bits. The Goddess of Destruction, Valkyrie, curls her lips into a wicked grin as she massages my chest.

“‘He would have smoked the competition,’ huh? I wouldn’t be so sure about that, Ristarte. Seiya Ryuuguuin *is* an amazing Hero, true. In fact, he’s such a catch that I’m pissed *you’re* his goddess and not me. But listen, there are three thousand other worlds out there.”

“...?! That’s great! Now do you think you could stop feeling me up?!”

I struggle and thrash about until I manage to get the Goddess of Destruction’s hands off me. Despite my disheveled dress and panting, Valkyrie continues talking like nothing happened.

“There are Heroes with stats higher than Seiya’s. For example...him.”

Huh...?

Valkyrie juts her chin to the side, pointing at a man wearing warrior-like attire who seems to have appeared out of nowhere. He is wearing silvery white plate armor and has short, chestnut-colored hair, blue eyes, and a few scars carved into his face.

“This is one of the Heroes I summoned. Allow me to introduce you. This is Ethan Schiffer. Job: battle master. He’s the strongest Hero I’ve seen in the last decade in the human world—in other words, the last millennium in the spirit world.”

The Hero waves at us and smiles.

“Ko’nichiwa, everybody-san.”

...?! Why is he speaking in broken Japanese?!

“Valkyrie! This Hero isn’t Japanese, is he?”

The parallel world fad is extremely popular in Earth’s Asia right now, so it has become pretty common among deities to summon Japanese people, since they’re quick to catch on.

Valkyrie cheerfully guffaws.

“Ethan lives in Japan, so when I summoned him, it didn’t take him long to piece together the situation.”

“Hai! I work on a military base in the Kanto area.”

He works on a military base?! Does that mean he’s a soldier?! H-he must really be tough! Valkyrie confidently grins.

“Ristarte, I’m in a good mood today, so I’ll let you see Ethan’s stats. Use Scan on him.”

“O-okay!”

I squint my eyes while using Scan on Valkyrie’s Hero.

Ethan Schiffer

Lv: 99 (MAX)

HP: 587654 MP: 55237

ATK: 567444 DEF: 405152 SPD: 384545 MAG: 25147 GRW: 999 (MAX)

What the...?! He’s not even in Berserk Mode, and his attack is already over 500,000?!

But I’m even more surprised when I see his skill list.

Techniques of Destruction

“H-he can even use your Techniques of Destruction?!”

“After teaching Seiya, I thought maybe Ethan could learn them, too. So when I called him over and tried to teach him, he ended up mastering them. He can do everything but Gate of Valhalla now.”

He mastered almost all of Valkyrie’s unique and secret moves?! I thought Seiya was the only human who could do that!

Valkyrie places a hand on the Hero’s shoulder.

“If I were to give him a title, I’d call him the Hero of Destruction or something.”

“Demo Valkyrie-san, that’d make me sound like a bad guy!”

All of a sudden, Aria timidly asks Valkyrie:

“So does that mean this Hero is going to be participating in the Divine Cup?”

“Yep. Your Hero’s gonna be in the tournament, too, right, Aria?”

“Y-yes, she plans on participating as well!”

“I hate to break it to you, but you’re wasting your time. There’s no one who can beat my Hero.”

Valkyrie grabs Ethan and wraps her arms around him just like she used to do to Seiya.

“The winner’s gonna be my Hero of Destruction—Ethan Schiffer.”

“*Hai!* I am going to win and become a god one day!”

“Ha-ha-ha! That’s the spirit! Now, let’s start training!”

Aria trembles as she watches Valkyrie walk away with Ethan.

“Th-there’s no time to waste! I have to summon my Hero and start training!”

“But Aria, does she really have a chance against Valkyrie’s Hero? You saw his stats!”

“The person I plan on summoning specializes in magic! I’m going to show everyone that a true Hero should be someone who can do more than physical attacks!”

I watch in muted amazement as Aria rushes off to the Summoning Chamber in the sanctuary, her large breasts bouncing with every step.

“I-I’ve never seen Aria so fired up!”

Cerceus crosses his arms and says:

“I don’t blame her. It is a huge honor for a deity to have their Hero win the prestigious Divine Cup.”

“...Why do I get the feeling that you know more about this tournament than you’re letting on?”

“Ha-ha-ha! You can tell? I’m actually a huge Divine Cup buff. I can even recite the name of every Hero who has ever participated! I’ve used crystal balls to watch past games multiple times, even!”

“Seriously?! Then why don’t you summon any Heroes if you like it so much?!”

“I like to watch, but I don’t like to participate.”

I regard Cerceus with disdain for admitting it so easily.

“*Sigh...* I know people like you—armchair MMA ‘masters’ who think they know how to fight just because they watch it every now and then.”

“...?! How dare you talk to me, the Divine Blade, like that!”

“A-anyway, heh-heh-heh-heh-heh... The Hero of Destruction, huh? H-he seemed really easygoing, b-but that was o-one impressive human. I-I can’t wait for th-the tournament next week.”

While watching Adenela snicker to herself, I begin to daydream.

A Hero that even surpasses Seiya... That does pique my interest. I wonder what kind of battle this is going to be.

And just like that, the gears to my first Divine Cup begin to turn.

CHAPTER 2

The Divine Hero

On the day of the tournament, the grounds are abuzz with a festival atmosphere, just as Cerceus said they would be. A massive colosseum, built with the God of Creation's powers, stands tall in the spirit world's plaza. After hearing that the colosseum, which can seat thousands upon thousands, was completed in only a few minutes, I say to myself in admiration:

"That's the spirit world for you."

When I walk inside, there are already countless deities seated in the stands. It appears that most deities in the unified spirit world have gathered within the cone-shaped arena, making it so crowded that there's barely any space to walk. I push through the horde until I arrive at the seat Aria said she'd reserved for me. Only after sitting can I finally let out a sigh of relief. However, I'm soon bothered by how hot the place is. The sun is shining directly on us because the colosseum has no roof, and the heat coming from the other deities' bodies isn't helping.

Mn... It's so hot...!

Then, all of a sudden, I hear a high-spirited voice coming from behind me.

"Iced coffee! Get your iced coffee! Nice and cold!"

Oh, someone's selling drinks! Perfect!

"Excuse me! One iced coffee, please!"

I turn around, only to find Cerceus carrying a massive coffee server like a backpack.

"...?! You?! Seriously?!"

"Wh-what? This way, I can watch the Divine Cup while making some quick coin at the same time. I'm killing two birds with one stone."

“Every day, you become a little less worthy of the title ‘God of Swords’...”

He pours some coffee out of the server on his back and hands it to me, so I pass him a goddon in return.

“Anyway, how’d you even get such a good seat, Rista?”

“Oh, Aria reserved it for me.”

“Being able to reserve seats like this is one benefit of having your Hero participate in the Divine Cup. You’re lucky.”

He has a point. The place is extremely crowded, but I’m sitting in the front row with a great view of where the match is going to take place. Cerceus lowers his coffee server near me.

“It’s about to start. Mind if I take a seat next to you and rest a little?”

“What?! Ew! No!”

“Oh, come on! Both seats on either side of you are empty!”

I reluctantly allow Cerceus to sit next to me since he promised to move when Aria and Adenela arrived. All of a sudden, a cheerful voice reverberates throughout the arena.

“Hello, everyone, and welcome to the tenth Divine Cup! I, the Goddess of Sound, Muza, will be your host today!”

A goddess wearing cat ears is speaking in the center of the colosseum. Despite not even wearing a mic, her voice can be heard clearly throughout the stadium. Maybe it helps that sound is her specialty.

“For our first match, in the west corner, we have the Impregnable Hero, Masato Morino, representing Aegis, the God of Shields!”

“Rista, look. The Hero’s coming.”

Cerceus points at a gate to a passageway that leads to the center of the colosseum. After it creaks open, a man wearing armor comes walking out equipped with a shield far too big for his delicate frame.

“And in the east corner, we have the Hero of Heaven’s Blow, Reimi Mochizuki, representing Ariadoa, the Goddess of the Seal!” The gate on the opposite side

opens to reveal a woman lightly equipped compared to her opponent. She is robed in a dress similar to the ones we goddesses wear, and is holding a staff. It looks like she is more of a magic-type Hero, just like Aria said. Reimi Mochizuki appears to be in her twenties with long, reddish-brown hair that hangs to her waist. She has a prominent nose and beautiful, fine features as well.

“So that’s Aria’s Hero...”

Aria and her Hero are conversing on one side of the colosseum while the white-bearded God of Shields, Aegis, and his Hero are speaking on the other. It reminds me of a cornerman with his boxer if I were to compare it with Seiya’s world. I’m guessing the deities will be giving their Heroes instruction during the battle as well.

Awash in the cheers of spectators, the two Heroes eventually leave their deity’s side and face each other in the center. Compared to Masato Morino’s slightly tense expression, Aria’s Hero, Reimi Mochizuki, shows a fearless smirk.

“Now, let the game begin!”

A gong reverberates throughout the colosseum, and immediately, the cheers grow even louder. Reimi promptly backsteps, creating distance between her and Masato. She then raises her staff into the air, and a giant magic circle appears before her.

She’s fast! She made that magic circle in less than a second!

But Masato already had his shield up, protecting himself from any potential attack. I almost immediately begin doubting my eyes because his shield begins to multiply horizontally until he has over ten shields surrounding himself!

“Whoa! Could this be a move passed down from the God of Shields himself?! Masato has replicated his shield and is bracing himself for Reimi’s magic attack!”

Reimi swings her staff, and the magic circle glitters.

“Tidal Wave.”

Copious amounts of water burst out of the massive magic circle. The momentum slowly gets stronger as the tidal wave closes in on Masato. The

powerful tsunami seemingly swallows him, but after it passes, Masato is still standing while surrounded by his shields just as he was moments ago. It doesn't look like he took any damage. Without missing a beat, Reimi is already creating another magic circle in the air.

“Lightning Ball.”

A sphere of lightning erupts from her magic circle. A few dozen suddenly appear in the blink of an eye before streaking toward Masato. The crackling barrage peppers his shields, but Aegis simply strokes his white beard and cheerfully laughs as he watches.

“First, you get his shields wet, then you try to use a lightning attack, huh? Unfortunately, that isn't going to work. The move I taught him, Absorb Shield, can completely block both physical and magical attacks. Furthermore...”

The Goddess of Sound suddenly raises her voice:

“Wh-what is the meaning of this?! Masato's shields are still harboring lightning, even though the lightning attack has already stopped! It's as if his shields were absorbing her attacks!”

I gulp air as well. Those shields aren't just for blocking! It's like the move Seiya used against the Death Keeper. He's absorbing her power!

“Focus on defending a little longer. Finish absorbing the rest of her attack, then counter and end this.”

“Understood.”

The God of Shields instructs Masato like a master to his pupil.

What are you going to do, Aria?!

I look over in Aria's direction in a panic, but she's just as calm as ever. Reimi Mochizuki laughs.

“A counter, huh? Good luck.”

She then raises her staff into the air once more.

“Tidal Wave.”

Sh-she's using water magic again?! Not only is it not going to work, but he's

going to absorb her magic! Another tidal wave slams into Masato's shields, but it's different from last time. The copious amount of water doesn't disappear from the colosseum. Instead, it turns into a massive sphere of water around him.

"Floating Bubble."

Reimi aims her free hand at Masato. The Goddess of Sound then yells:

"Is this wind magic I see?! Masato has been trapped!"

Masato is technically underwater now. I get that he can defend against anything with his shields, but he's only human.

"Is he going to be okay? He's not going to drown, right?"

Right after Reimi chuckles, Masato lowers his shields, then unsheathes his sword underwater, unable to endure any longer. He immediately cuts through the sphere of liquid, expelling large volumes of water along with himself.

"Pant... Pant..."

After escaping, he gasps for air, faces forward, and shudders...because there were already countless spheres of lightning completely surrounding him! Before he can even raise his shield, the lightning magic strikes his body.

"Gwah!"

Masato shakes as if he were being electrocuted before dropping to the ground. The Goddess of Sound declares:

"G-game, set, and match! The winner: Ariadoa's Hero, Reimi Mochizuki!"

The crowd explodes with applause and cheers.

S-so this is Aria's Hero! What power! Her opponent was a carefully selected Hero, and yet, she crushed him!

"Hey, Cerceus! Do battles between Heroes usually end this quickly?"

"Not at all! Some battles last more than an hour, even! The difference in skill was just too high this time. That's all."

Cerceus can't contain his excitement.

“At any rate, Ariadoa is amazing! She can use her ability to break seals in order to awaken her Heroes’ hidden powers! She’s the sole reason Reimi Mochizuki was able to become a summoner! She’s the ideal goddess for summoning Heroes!”

Not only Cerceus, but every deity in the arena is buzzing with excitement. I could even hear the people behind me say:

“That’s Aria for ya! There aren’t many who can raise a Hero quite like she can!”

“I bet Aria’s Hero and Valkyrie’s Hero are gonna end up going head-to-head again!”

I almost jump out of my seat after hearing that, and Cerceus looks up at me with surprise.

“H-hey, where are you going, Rista? Valkyrie’s Hero is fighting next, you know?”

“Yeah, but I already know he’s going to win, so I’m just going to come back later when the final match starts. Tell Aria I said ‘hi’ when she gets here.”

“S-seriously?! You still haven’t even finished your coffee.”

“Yeah, it’s awful. Dump it out for me when you get a chance.”

“...?! Don’t you think it’s a little rude to say that to the man who made it?!”

I wave good-bye to the yelling Divine Blade and retire from the colosseum.

After heading farther down the plaza, I look back at the round arena. I can still hear the deities’ spirited cheers, despite being this far away. The colosseum is apparently going to be taken down almost immediately after the Divine Cup ends. The God of Creation made it in the blink of an eye, so I’m sure they can get rid of it just as quickly, only to bring it back again in another thousand years.

I think back to the match. It was impressive. I’m sure the following battles are going to be just as amazing. As a goddess who saves parallel worlds, I should probably stay and watch, but... But...

Sigh... If only Seiya were allowed to participate...

I heave another sigh...which must mean I'm frustrated, and that's probably why I left the colosseum. Valkyrie's Hero's stats were extraordinary when I checked, and Aria's Hero possesses incredible magic power, but I still think it's plenty possible for Seiya to win if he goes into Berserk Mode. Plus, what he does is remarkable in a different way than what makes them special.

I'm sure the other deities would also gasp in admiration if they saw what Seiya could do!

I sulk as I walk away from the colosseum until I notice a space that looks to have been set up just for the event.

"Hm? I wonder what this is."

Written on the sign are the words PAST HEROES EXHIBITION HALL.

Oh, I had no idea they made one of these, too. Seeing that it's an exhibition hall, I'm guessing I can see past Heroes who won the Divine Cup. I was planning on ignoring the building, but I instead stop dead in my tracks. If I'm not going to watch the matches, I could at least check out what kinds of Heroes there used to be. With that thought in mind, I step foot into the exhibition hall. It's extremely quiet inside, which is understandable since the Divine Cup is still going on. The colosseum was created two days ago, so I guess this was created around the same time. These kinds of exhibitions are probably something people check out only before the event begins.

"Welcome."

I turn around to the voice, but there's nobody there. However, when I lower my gaze, I find a small girl in a kimono before me.

"R-Rasti?!"

"Long time no see, Rista."

The Goddess of Shape-Shifting, who taught Seiya how to Transform, is standing before me. She is so short that it's easy to mistake her for a little girl, and her cherubic appearance doesn't do her any favors, either. Nevertheless, she has apparently been alive for tens of thousands of years. It's still unusual to see her outside of the secluded celestial mountains, though...

“What are you doing here?”

“I lost in a game of rock paper scissors, so I have to work reception at this special event space.”

“O-oh, you don’t say. Wait! Rock paper scissors...?!”

“As you can see, I haven’t had any visitors, so it’s been rather boring. I’m glad you came. Let me show you around.”

Rasti then motions for me to follow her and walks ahead. She ends up bringing me to a hallway with pictures lined up on the walls like an art museum.

“These are the portraits of the legendary Heroes. Not only those who won the Divine Cup, but also legendary Heroes who have saved multiple parallel worlds.”

“Oh, wow.”

“This exhibition hall is normally under the heart’s jurisdiction, but it was temporarily moved here for the Divine Cup.”

“Look at all these Heroes!”

I find myself utterly astonished by the dozens of portraits. Rasti proudly says:

“Incidentally, the Divine Cup was founded ten thousand years ago.”

“I-it’s been going on that long?!”

“Well, in the human world, it has only been a century, but numerous Heroes have been summoned during that time, and there are even Heroes on this wall that are now deities themselves.”

“Oh, really?”

“Anyway, please take your time and enjoy the exhibition.”

After Rasti leaves, I walk down the passage alone while looking at the portraits. Underneath the paintings are plates with the Hero’s name and title written on them.

THE HERO OF ADVANCEMENT, AKIHIKO TSUKAMOTO

THE HOT-BLOODED HERO, GOUKI HITANI

THE BRUTAL HERO, AKARI RIN

THE HERO OF GRATIFICATION, MITSUE ENOKI

THE NIMBLE HERO, HAYATO MITARAI

THE HERO OF GOOD FORTUNE, KYOUKO SHIBA

Th-there are so many different titles! Seiya would definitely be “The Cautious Hero.” The titles are so interesting that I can’t help but read over every last one of them. However, by the time I reach the end of the hallway...

“Hm? What’s this?”

The words fall naturally out of my mouth. The last spot has a frame, but there’s no portrait. There is, however, a plate with a title on it.

THE DIVINE HERO

It’s strange. The title’s still here, but there’s no portrait inside the frame. It’s as if someone had removed it. There’s no name on the plate, either. H-hold on... After a closer inspection, it looks like the name was just scratched off. I squint hard at the space when, all of a sudden, Rasti comes jogging over.

“Hey, uh... Rasti? What happened to—”

“Rista! Rista!”

Rasti eagerly shows me a crystal ball displaying the inside of the colosseum.

“Valkyrie’s Hero and Aria’s Hero are about to fight!”

“What?! Already?!”

“They were apparently on the same bracket! Valkyrie has trained over five legendary Heroes already! And Aria has the next greatest number of legendary Heroes under her belt! This match is a clash of fate! It’s more or less the grand finals!”

Valkyrie may be the strongest goddess in the unified spirit world, but Aria is no slouch, either! She’s a seasoned goddess that has saved over three hundred parallel worlds, after all. There’s no telling who will win.

“I have to close the exhibition hall! There’s no way I’m going to miss this!”

Rasti tosses the crystal ball on the ground, then runs to the door as fast as she can.

What the...?! She's not even going to lock up?! A-anyway, I should probably go watch the fight, too!

"Rasti, wait! I'm coming with you!"

I rush after Rasti and head back to the colosseum.

"Now, for the match you've all been waiting for! The Hero of Heaven's Blow, Reimi Mochizuki, is already anxiously waiting for the Hero of Destruction, Ethan Schiffer, in the center of the arena!"

The Goddess of Sound, Muza, raises her voice. When I return to my front-row seat, Adenela and Cerceus are sitting one seat apart from each other. I promptly sit down in the seat between them.

"Oh, Rista! You're back!"

"G-good t-timing. The m-match is about to s-start."

Aria is frantically giving Reimi Mochizuki instruction in her corner.

"Stay calm, Reimi! All you need to do is keep a safe distance just like we practiced! It doesn't matter how high his attack power is if he can't touch you!"

"You can count on me. I won't let him get close to me, no matter what."

Ethan still hasn't appeared, but Valkyrie is already waiting in his corner on the opposite side. Listening to their conversation, she roars with laughter.

"Ha-ha-ha! It sounds like you've come up with quite a few strategies, but it'll all be for nothing! You can't beat my Hero!"

"We won't know unless we try!"

Aria is stricken with rage. M-man, it's not often I see Aria like this. I guess Rasti wasn't joking about it being a clash of fate...

"Now, let's hear it for Ethan Schiffer! Come on out!"

The crowd erupts with cheers as the gate to Ethan's passageway opens. Every deity's eyes are glued to it. However, no matter how much time passes, the Hero of Destruction doesn't appear.

“What’s going on?”

“Did something happen?”

Even Valkyrie furrows her brow.

“The hell is Ethan doing? Takin’ a piss or something?”

A commotion slowly overtakes the crowd when, all of a sudden, something is tossed into the air from inside the passageway and lands inside the arena. It hits the ground with a thud before rolling on the stone pavement.

Huh...?

And since I’m sitting in the front row, I get a clear view of what that *something* is. I double-check—triple-check—until the image is burned into my mind. But my heart can’t accept what my eyes are seeing. If something terrifying were to happen so suddenly, even a deity would be in shock to the point that they couldn’t even scream. Rolling on the floor is the head of Valkyrie’s Hero, Ethan Schiffer, twisted in agony.

Paradise Lost

The crowd begins buzzing.

“A-a human head?”

“No way. This has to be some sort of performance.”

“H-hey! What’s that?”

Everyone, including me, looks in the direction the deity is pointing. The gate slowly opens, and someone begins walking into the arena. They’re wearing plate armor with niello on their slender frame, but what stands out to me the most is their mask.

“Th-that’s...!”

I instinctively leap out of my chair and start rushing toward the center.

“R-Rista, wh-what’s wrong?”

“Wait! Where do you think you’re going?”

Adenela and Cerceus try to stop me, but I keep running. This isn’t a performance. Ethan Schiffer was killed! I recognize that mask and that dark crimson, ominous aura radiating from their body!

That’s the person that was with Mersais in Sage Village!

After reaching Aria’s corner, I violently shake her by the shoulders.

“Aria! Get Reimi Mochizuki to stay back! That person is dangerous!”

Reimi stares at the approaching masked individual. Aria nods doesn’t say a word. She obviously must have already sensed the enemy’s odd aura.

“Reimi! Let the deities handle the intruder!”

“B-but...”

“Fall back! Now!”

Reimi reluctantly retreats a half step, taken aback by Aria’s unusually stern tone. In her place, a deity steps foot into the battleground. Valkyrie approaches Ethan’s head and looks at it for a few moments before glaring at the masked intruder in the center.

“Was this your doing?”

“Yep.”

With that immediate muffled word, Valkyrie vanishes into thin air. A dry sound echoes, and immediately, their places had switched.

D-did Valkyrie attack?! I didn’t even see what happened!

The masked warrior adjusts their body’s position while speaking with a demure voice: “Whoa. That was a close one. You deities sure are fast.”

“I commend you for avoiding a direct hit. I meant to crush your skull. But ‘that was a close one’? Don’t make me laugh.”

Valkyrie cracks her knuckles, and a crack suddenly runs through her opponent’s mask.

“The First Valkyrja: Shattered Break.”

The cracked mask then crumbles to the ground. I thought the warrior behind it would be a hideous monster, but the mask instead fell away to reveal glossy lips, long eyelashes, and...

“Oh? I thought I dodged it completely. Amazing.”

The intruder’s voice is no longer being muffled by the mask. It’s the youthful voice of a woman.

“Come on, I thought deities weren’t supposed to harm humans.”

Valkyrie’s eyes open wide as she stares at the woman combing back her rather short hair.

“You’re...!”

What?! Does Valkyrie know her?

As if feigning ignorance, the woman continues: “I probably would have ended up like that guy if I was any slower.”

She cackles while pointing at Ethan’s head.

“By the way, he was one of the favorites to win the tournament, right? Rather unimpressive, that one.”

“My Hero was ‘unimpressive’?”

“His stats were high, but that doesn’t have anything to do with being strong. What if someone graduates from a leading university at the top of their class, but they’re later arrested for molesting someone? Wouldn’t you question their intelligence? It’s like that.”

“I’ve heard enough of your bullshit!”

“I’m just disappointed by how weak he was, being a former Hero myself and all.”

A-a “former Hero”?!

I yell to Aria at my side:

“Aria! Just who is she?!”

Aria then mutters:

“The Divine Hero...!”

D-didn’t I see that title back in the exhibition hall?

“But...this...this can’t be happening! A soul that has been destroyed cannot be revived!”

Aria exclaims in a trembling voice. It appears both Aria and Valkyrie know this woman. I want to ask what happened, but Aria is frantically panting. I return my gaze to the center of the arena and gasp...because the woman is staring right at me!

“We’ve met before, haven’t we? Hey, where’s that guy you were with last time? I’m sure he’s way stronger than this one was.”

“S-Seiya’s not in the spirit world!”

“Awww. How boring.”

She appears genuinely disappointed until...

“Where do you think you’re lookin’?”

Valkyrie throws herself at the woman from behind and swings a fist infused with her powers of destruction. There’s a metallic clang, and I witness yet another hard-to-believe sight. In between Valkyrie and the so-called former Hero is a familiar goddess wearing camouflage and crossing two swords together, blocking Valkyrie’s fist.

“Z-Zet?!”

I instinctively cry out. But...! But I thought Brahma imprisoned her! She’s the Goddess of Warfare, who taught Seiya how to go into Berserk Mode. She pushes the chain-wrapped fist away with her swords, then says to the former Hero: “Don’t let your guard down. She’s the strongest goddess in the entire unified spirit world.”

“Hold on, Zet. Are you saying I couldn’t beat her even in Phase Four?”

“You mean Berserk: Phase Four? It’s a strange feeling, knowing that you can use that even though I never taught it to you. But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. This is the almighty power of Mersais, after all.”

“So can I win or not?”

“...Just stick to the plan for now.”

“Yeah, I guess that would be for the best.”

Zet faces Valkyrie in a battle stance, brandishing her blades. The former Hero then uses this moment to retrieve a piece of paper from her breast pocket. She throws it into the air, and the red magic circle drawn on it grows until it materializes into the real thing.

“The gate’s open. Ready when you are.”

A decrepit arm, like that of a corpse, appears from the eerie circle of blood.

“D-don’t tell me...!”

The bad feeling in my gut was right. An undead wearing armor, an individual

wearing a black robe and emitting an evil aura, a man with the frightening body of an insect—abnormal creatures slowly begin to crawl out from the gate!

“D-demons...!”

The sight causes a commotion among the deities in the colosseum. The creatures, which are just as malevolent and threatening as a Demon Lord from an SS-ranked world, gradually drop to one knee around the gate. And eventually, the Goddess of Atrocity gallantly emerges from the magic circle with flowing brindle hair.

Mersais...!

But her aura isn't divine. Rather, it's pitch-black and sinister to the core. And yet, she possesses an overwhelming presence and radiates such beauty that I find myself bewitched.

Mersais observes the arena while walking through the kneeling devils.

“I'm home, unified spirit world.”

Valkyrie, who is standing just ahead of her, clicks her tongue.

“So this was all your doing, huh?”

“Valkyrie...and I see Aria is here as well. So many familiar faces.”

“Don't get cocky. Do you really think we're gonna let you leave in one piece? This colosseum is surrounded by gods.”

“That won't be a problem. This arena wasn't chosen by chance, after all.”

“Sounds like everything's going according to your little plan, huh? That pisses me off. How'd you make sure Ishtar didn't see you coming, though? You snuck Zet out, summoned a former Hero, and even brought in devils somehow. That's not something you can do in the spirit world.”

Y-yeah, Ishtar can see into the near future, so how did she pull this off?

“I learned something the last time we fought. Ishtar can't see her own future. All I had to do was kill her first. Problem solved.”

“...What?”

Mersais gives the signal, and Zet walks over with a large, straw sack that had

been resting at her side.

“There you go.”

Thud. Zet smirks near Mersais.

“I’m sure I don’t need to tell you what’s inside.”

Dark red blood leaks from of the sack, and my entire body freezes.

“N-n-no...! This can’t be happening! Wh-what did you do to Ishtar?!”

“Rista, calm down! Deities don’t die even if they lose their physical bodies! I’m sure Ishtar will be okay!”

Aria raises her voice, almost like she was trying to convince herself as well. However, Zet apparently heard her yelling.

“Usually, that’d be the case, but there is an exception when you use this.”

Zet raises her jet-black swords into the air, miasma radiating from the blades.

“Chain Destruction. Killing a god is no problem as long as I have this, so you should probably be careful.”

Immediately, Zet leaps into the crowd with her swords! The bizarre creatures draw their weapons and charge the deities as well.

“Ahhhhhh!”



“Nooo!”

After hearing they were going to be killed, the normally dignified deities begin to panic and attempt to escape the colosseum all at once. The sounds of swords clashing intertwine with screams of terror. In a loud voice, Zet declares: “Hear me, all those who have taken peace for granted! The second Armagezeeda has come! ...Ah?!”

But she is cut off by a fierce noise and rumble. The ground where Zet was standing is now a crater. She managed to dodge a direct hit, but standing before her is the Goddess of War, Adenela. Her loose and disheveled hair is standing on end as she holds her sword in a fully swung position.

“A-Adenela...!”

“Z-Z-Zet...!”

They exchange intense glares until...

“Z-Zet! D-d-drop dead!”

“You’re going to be the one who dies!”

I knew there was bad blood between Adenela and Zet, but each clash of their swords explodes with thousands of years of repressed animosity.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Things are getting exciting in here!”

The former Hero roars with laughter by Mersais’s side, and Valkyrie glares at her.

“Hey, shitbag. Just answer me this: Did you kill Ethan with Chain Destruction, too?”

“Sure did.”

“...Ethan had a kid.”

“And...?”

Valkyrie is consumed by rage. A warping sound reverberates over the laughing former Hero’s head. She looks up to see a new magic circle in the air. Mersais looks up as well and mutters: “A temporal magic... Chronoa. But she’s already too late. The Anti-Clock Field has already taken effect.”

Th-that's the move that Chronoa taught Seiya to prevent time from being manipulated! Mersais can use it, too?! But how...?!

"The world has already begun to distort."

Mersais mutters. There are so many things I can't process that my head is almost in a state of panic. Wh-what is going to happen to the spirit world?!

But our ray of hope—the strongest goddess stands before Mersais.

"There's no need to freeze time! I'll rip every last one of them to pieces!"

"The Goddess of Destruction, Valkyrie. The most powerful deity in the spirit world when it comes to both physical attack and abilities. All of the deities who joined me last time were slain by your hand."

"This time won't be any different."

"After being banished with my soul, I wandered countless parallel worlds and gained even greater powers of Atrocity."

"I'm sure you came back because you believed you stood a chance against me now. I'm not underestimating you. It just doesn't matter. Not when I do this."

Valkyrie thereupon screams to the skies:

"Heart of the spirit world! Order!"

Immediately, an unbelievable aura overflows from her body. She must have gotten permission from the heart in Ishtar's place. My body naturally trembles in the presence of her true power. Valkyrie's limit has been broken, which allows her to use her ultimate stats.

"There won't be a second time, Mersais. Honestly, I went a little easy on you last time."

She places her left hand over her right and extends her arm toward her opponent. I shudder. The final battle against the Demon Lord of Gaeabrande replays in my mind. That's Valkyrie's final attack! There's no way to dodge it!

"You're trying to use Gate of Valhalla, huh?"

"There's nothing you can do about it now."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that."

A miasma-like aura flows out of Mersais's body, forcing the space around her to ripple like a mirage.

Wh-what is this aura?!

There's something ominous about it that I've never seen before, so I yell to Valkyrie: "Valkyrie, you have to hurry! Open Gate of Valhalla!"

"D-dammit...!"

But Valkyrie's hand won't remain still. It's almost like she's having trouble aiming. Then Mersais calmly says: "The spirit world's long history comes to an end today. Everything shall be born anew, and the universe shall finally be made right."

Before Valkyrie can even use Gate of Valhalla, Mersais swings an arm into the ground.

"Through the Never."

Her fist causes large ripples in the ground, which flow into open space until the entire colosseum is distorted. Everything before me is shaking. My legs turn to jelly, and I can no longer stand. I crouch, but before long, I start to feel unbearably dizzy until I'm unable to think straight, and I slowly lose consciousness.

CHAPTER 4

In a Twisted World

I wonder how much time has passed since then. Perhaps only a few seconds. Perhaps countless hours.

The death of the Hero of Destruction, and the Goddess of Warfare, Zet's attack, and...the Goddess of Atrocity, Mersais...

What happened to Ishtar, Aria, and the spirit world itself? What's going to happen to me? So many frightening things have happened, enough to plummet someone into the depths of despair. I seek help as my consciousness wanders the abyss. While I am a goddess, there is still one name that finds its way to the forefront of my mind every time I am in trouble. It isn't the name of any deity but, rather, the name of the man I love.

Seiya...! Help!

But no matter how many times I scream his name in my heart, there is no reply. I feel a warmth instead. A burly chest touches my face as a familiar scent tickles my nose.

S-Seiya?! It's Seiya! It has to be! He's always there for me when I'm in trouble! I squeeze him tightly in my arms and open my eyes.

"Seiya!!"

However, the person in front of me isn't Seiya but a muscular man with a scraggly beard and rosy red cheeks.

"Come on, Rista. Stop hugging me like that. You're making me blush."

"...?! Get off me!"

"Whoa! Ouch!"

I shove Cerceus away with all my might, then curl into a ball.

"Bleeeh!!"

“What is wrong with you?! *You’re* the one who hugged *me*, and now you’re gagging?!”

“Hold on... I seriously threw up a little...”

“...?! You’re actually vomiting?! How rude can you be?!”

I lightly shake my head amid Cerceus’s cries.

I’m such an idiot. Why would Seiya be here when I never even summoned him? Wait... Where am I?

After wiping the corners of my mouth, I survey the area in muted amazement. All I can see is an endless wasteland. Withered grass and cracked stones litter the fine sand. It’s unlike any natural desert, though. It looks more like there was an explosion here long, long ago. I can even see human bones scattered about in the distance.

“Wh-what is this eerie place?! Cerceus!”

“I don’t know, but it’s clearly not the spirit world.”

He replies in a surprisingly composed tone, so I turn around...only to find his legs trembling as he hugs himself.

“A malevolent aura suffocates this place. I’m scared... Rista, can I hold your hand?”

“No! Hold your own hand!”

“What would be the point in that?! You’re one coldhearted goddess, you know that?!”

“More importantly, where’s Aria? Where’s Adenela? What happened to the other deities?”

“You were the only one nearby when I woke up. We might be the only ones who were sent to this bizarre place.”

“What...?!”

I’m at a loss for words, but Cerceus speaks as if he were trying to cheer himself up.

“Don’t let it get you down! I mean, at least we’re okay! And—”

“No. No, Cerceus, that’s not it. I’d seriously rather be dead than be alone with you.”

“Are you s—?! Give me a break already!”

“Anyway, let’s go back to the spirit world!”

“G-good idea. Rista, open a gate.”

“Wait. Can you not create gates?”

“No, I’ve never tried. I don’t even know how to.”

“Sigh...”

Fed up with Mr. Beach Muscles, I chant the spell to create a gate to the spirit world, then gently begin to open it as my heart pounds.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“Give me a second.”

In Ixphoria, spell stones would create white walls behind gates to prevent us from returning to the spirit world, so I had a feeling we wouldn’t be able to safely return this time, either, but to my surprise, there’s no wall behind the gate.

“Thank goodness! It looks like we can go home!”

Relieved, I walk through the gate with Cerceus, but the moment we reach the other side, his eyes snap open wide.

“Hey, Rista... Are you sure this is the spirit world? Something doesn’t seem right.” I connected the gate to the spirit world’s plaza like I always do, but the area is covered in a deep fog, making it hard to see anything.

“What in the world is this fog?”

“This was probably Mersais’s doing... Let’s look for someone and ask them what happened!”

Cerceus and I slowly walk through the dense fog for a while, hardly able to see, until Cerceus eventually creases his eyes.

“There’s someone over there.”

I see the back of a white-robed deity walking away. I sense no malice, nor does it seem to be Mersais or a devil. Cerceus and I approach the deity.

“Um... Excuse me! Is Mersais—no. Is the spirit world okay?!”

“...‘Spirit world’?”

They reply in an unusually high voice before slowly turning around, and immediately, I almost faint. Because their face is hollow! It’s nothing more than a large, pitch-black hole!

““Eek!””

We naturally scream. Laughter then suddenly echoes from the void.

“Hyah-ha-ha-ha-ha! This is the underworld.”

“Th-the underworld?!”

As the mysterious individual approaches us, I step back and yell: “O-oh, okay! Thanks for your help!”

Cerceus and I immediately sprint through the dense fog as fast as we can, retracing our steps for a good while until we stop to talk. Cerceus furiously yells: “I told you this wasn’t the spirit world!”

“B-but it doesn’t make any sense! I’ve never messed up before! Not even once!”

“But she said this was the ‘underworld’! Why did the gate take us here?!”

“I don’t know... Wait! I hear something...”

Immediately, the dense fog is cut through, and the hollow-faced individual appears before us!

“Whoa?! She came after us?!”

“Hyah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Divine aura, divine aura! I feel it, I feel it, I feel it, I feel it, I feel it.”

She approaches Cerceus while repeating those words.

“What?! W-wait, um... I-is there something y-you need from little ol’ me?!”

The mysterious person draws her face closer to “little ol’ Cerceus,” and a long

tongue emerges from the hole!

“Drool... Yum! Gods are so yumyyyyyyy!”

...Lick.

“...?! E-eeeeeeeeek!!”

Cerceus screams, then bolts off like lightning, so I panic and chase after him.

“W-wait!”

“You gotta be kidding me! She’s going to eat me! Rista, the gate! The gaaaaaate!”

“Wh-where do you want to go?!”

“Anywhere! Anywhere but here!”

After promptly opening a gate, Cerceus and I leap inside.

On the other side, we once again find ourselves in a wasteland. We returned to the world we were in earlier.

“I-I thought she was going to swallow me whole...!”

Cerceus grabs some of the fine sand at his feet and begins wiping off the sticky goo on his face and arms.

“Hey, Cerceus? What is the underworld, exactly?”

“Ishtar told me about it once long ago. It’s apparently a world that exists between the spirit world and the malevolent realm of demons. I don’t know the specifics, though.”

“I wonder why the gate connected us to the underworld, though...”

I suddenly recall Mersais saying that the history of the spirit world had come to an end.

“I-I’m going to open another gate!”

I create another gate to the spirit world in order to dispel the bad feeling in my gut. But when I gently open it, it’s nothing but a thick fog and...

“Drool... Slurp...”

“...?! She’s still here!”

Hearing the creature lick its lips, I immediately close the gate. Like hell I’m gonna let it lick my face like it did Cerceus’s! If we can’t go to the spirit world, then how about my hometown from when I was human?

I try to open a gate to Ixphoria, but I can’t. It appears the underworld and this wasteland are our only options.

“*Sigh...* What are we going to do?”

As I worry over our next move, Cerceus suddenly calls out to me from behind.

“Hey, Rista. Where are you going? You’re walking pretty fast.”

That’s when I finally realize it. I’m unconsciously walking in a certain direction while thinking. It’s a strange feeling, really.

“What the...?”

I was so startled when I first woke up that I didn’t realize it, but after thinking about it for a few moments, I start to feel like I’ve been here before.

“I’m pretty sure...there’s a town up ahead...”

“What makes you say that?”

I don’t know how to explain it. It’s just a feeling. I push forward, trudging through the sand. Cerceus creases his eyes and just barely notices the silhouette of a town off in the distance.

“Oh! You were right, Rista!”

Even I’m surprised by that, but I rush over, only to be disappointed. It’s nothing more than a ghost town with run-down shops and dilapidated houses. Cerceus picks up a decaying sign at his feet and mutters: “A town sign? It says, ‘Edona Village.’”

Hm? Edona... Edona... I feel like I’ve heard the name before...

“R-Rista! Someone’s coming!”

Cerceus shouts, breaking my train of thought. A shadowy figure approaches us from up ahead, but it’s no ordinary human. It’s a giant lizard wearing armor.

“A bipedal lizard?! What is that thing?!”

“It’s a dragonewt!”

I’ve saved close to ten parallel worlds in my life, but there’s only one where I saw dragonewts. It was an S-ranked world, and it was the first time I summoned Seiya.

“‘Dragonewts!’ ‘Edona!’ Now I remember! This is Gaeabrande!”

“‘Gaeabrande’?”

“It’s a world Seiya and I saved!”

The dragonewt continues to approach us, but I am completely relaxed, since I know he isn’t our enemy. Just as I expected, the dragonewt respectfully gets on one knee before me.

“How divine. Are you a goddess, perchance?”

“Y-yes, I am. Um... This is Gaeabrande, right?”

“Yes, Goddess.”

“I knew it!”

I feel slightly relaxed after confirming that this is a place I know. I’m sure Rosalie, Mash, and Elulu are still living in the Roseguard Empire. At any rate, my concern for the town of Edona does not wane, since it looks nothing like it did the last time I was here.

“Um... What happened to this town? Did new monsters appear or something?”

“This town was destroyed in battle a little over ten years ago. It was a bitter struggle between us dragonewts and the Demon Lord’s army. Though countless lives were lost, we managed to defeat the Demon Lord and save the world.”

“...What?”

It almost sounds like he’s taking credit for what Seiya and I did. It’s kind of aggravating, to be honest.

“Not so fast! The Hero I summoned, Seiya Ryuuguuin, defeated the Demon Lord!”

“A Hero has never appeared in Gaeabrande. This is also the first time you, Goddess, have ever graced us with your presence.”

“...?!”

“Our savior, who defeated the Demon Lord and liberated the world, was the almighty Dragon Lord Dragonnight.”

“The Dragon Lord...Dragonnight...”

“After defeating the Demon Lord, he began his reign over Gaeabrande for the welfare of all dragonewts from the holy land of Bahamutros. It was all made possible thanks to the Seraph’s blessing...”

I have no idea what he’s talking about, and I’m starting to get the feeling that he might be a little off his rocker. After all, Edona was a human town. Why would a dragonewt even be here?

Feeling something is off, I take a good look at the dragonewt’s face...and a shiver runs down my spine. He may be smiling, but I sense something dark deep inside him.

I-I’m starting to feel déjà vu...

The first thing that comes to mind is when the emperor asked me to meet him in the sanctuary, where he tried to kill me with Chain Destruction. I sense the same thing in this dragonewt’s heart: malice. When I take a step back, the dragonewt pulls a book out from under his breastplate. He then opens the thick red tome.

“Article six in the Seraph’s scriptures says this: ‘There may be a time where individuals claiming to be a Goddess and Hero appear. However, they shall only bring disaster. Wield Chain Destruction and slaughter them.’”

Immediately, a blade far longer than any book emerges from the scripture like a magic trick. The dragonewt then swiftly grabs the sword, gets into a fighting stance, and swings it in a wide arc.

“Eek?!”

Cerceus screams, but I was already prepared. I lunge and tackle him, causing us both to topple to the ground and dodge the strike. The dragonewt seems

impressed.

“Oh? You have good intuition.”

“W-well, this isn’t the first time this has happened to me!”

“Regardless, those who misrepresent themselves as the Hero and Goddess must die.”

The dragonewt glares at Cerceus with his cold, reptilian eyes.

“You must be the Hero, yes?”

“No! I’m the God of—er... I run a café!”

I’m appalled. He won’t even admit he’s a god because he doesn’t want to get hurt! How spineless can you be?!

But the dragonewt pokes his tongue out of his slit mouth.

“Then prepare to die, ‘Hero of the Café.’”

“I told you I’m not a Hero! I just own a café!”

“Relax, Cerceus! Unlike in Ixphoria, the monsters in Gaeabrande aren’t that strong! You should be able to beat him!”

“O-oh, really! He’s not strong? Let me check...”

Cerceus appears to be checking the dragonewt’s stats, so I decide to use Scan as well.

Dragonewt

Lv: 41

HP: 67842 MP: 0

ATK: 35515 DEF: 37489...

“Excuse me?! This lizard’s extremely strong! His stats are barely any different from mine!”

“What the...?!”

Even I’m surprised. His stats closely resemble the powerful beastfolk I saw in

Ixphoria. B-but that doesn't make any sense! This is Gaeabrande! Is this dragonewt especially strong? There's no way of knowing. Regardless, it doesn't make any sense that a lizard-person would be as strong as a god known as the Divine Blade—God of Swords.

"Anyway, I'm unarmed, and he has that Chain-thing! We have to run!"

"I will not let you escape."

The dragonewt raises his sword aloft and lunges at Cerceus, but I throw my homemade sandbag at his face.

"Gwah!"

He groans while crouching. It looks like the sand got in his eyes, just as I had hoped.

"Cerceus, let's get out of here!"

"O-okay!"

We sprint through the ghost town of Edona, gasping for breath, until we arrive at what appears to be the center. Numerous collapsed buildings are jumbled together, so we decide to hide in the shadow of one of them.

"Pant... Pant... Pant..."

As I try to calm down, Cerceus turns to me with a look of surprise and asks: "Rista! Where did you get that bag of sand?"

"Well, you know how we walked through all that sand on the way to town? I started to pick some up and stuffed it in a pouch just in case."

"You've become somewhat...cautious...hm? Just like that Hero of yours."

It looks like Seiya's rubbed off on me a little. At any rate, I can hear the dragonewt furiously shouting in the distance.

"Where did you go, you filthy heretics?! We, the Order of Seraph, shall not yield to those who claim to be the Hero. Not even Demon's Sword is an exception!"

"The 'Order of Seraph'? What is he talking about?!"

I peek in the dragonewt's direction from our hiding place, only to discover

that there are three of them now.

H-he had allies?!

But there are tons of buildings here, so it looks like he's having a hard time finding us. The dragonewts are walking in the complete opposite direction of where we are.

"Phew... Looks like we can relax for now."

"This is no time to relax! This world is dangerous! Are you sure you weren't lying when you said you saved it?!"

"I wasn't lying! We really did save it! But this is..."

Did we go back in time to before Seiya and I saved Gaeabrande? No, if anything, it feels like we're in the future...? N-no, wait... There's something really different about this. Something is...!

"R-Rista! There's a dragonewt over there, too!"

Cerceus whispers. When I look in the same direction that he's pointing, I see a dragonewt wearing hemp clothing instead of armor like the rest.

"Seriously?! Just how many of them are there?!"

"This is not good! Let's get out of here, Rista! It's a gamble, but we've got to run for it and get out of this town!"

"Y-you're right. ...Wait."

I want to escape just as badly as he does, but I suddenly think to myself, *What would Seiya do?*

"The dragonewts have already told their allies that we're hiding somewhere in the town, so it's highly likely we'll get caught if we run now. Let's keep hiding a little bit longer and see how things play out."

"A-are you sure that's a good idea?"

"This building appears to be empty. Let's go inside."

We enter the deserted house. After slowly closing the door so it doesn't make a sound, we crouch under a broken window. It's the best spot to see what's happening outside, after all.

“Mn...”

Cercean groans behind me.

“Wh-what’s wrong? Did you get hurt?”

“No. I just have a migraine due to all the stress and being so nervous. I can’t wait to go home and eat some silver dollar pancakes...”

“Seriously?! Could you be any more useless?!”

Ugh! I can’t count on Cercean for anything! It looks like I’m going to be the one fighting if it comes down to it! I made one more sandbag to distract the enemy, so I better have it ready just in case.

As I pull the pouch out from under my lapel, a sheet of paper slides out with it and flutters to the floor. It’s the Hero summoning list with Seiya’s name on it. I pick it up in a fluster, and my eyes open wide, for glittering in gold at the bottom of the list are the words: Parallel world of S-rank or higher confirmed. Permission to summon Seiya Ryuuguuin granted.

Underworld

“I-I can summon him! I can summon Seiya!”

I scream with joy in the dilapidated building. Cerceus, on the other hand, furrows his brow.

“But wouldn’t his level be reset to level one again? I don’t think summoning him like that is really going to help us right now...”

“So *you’re* going to get us out of this, then?!”

“Argh! My gastritis, pneumonitis, and nephritis...! Sorry, I wanna help, but...!”

“...?! Even a level-one Seiya would be a thousand times more useful than you! Just go keep an eye out for dragonewts while I summon him!”

After forcing Cerceus to keep watch at the window, I make preparations for the Hero summoning. I grab the summoning chalk from under my lapel and begin drawing a magic circle on the dirty floor. Maybe summoning Seiya with all of his stats reset isn’t going to help us. Not only that, but I’d be putting Seiya in danger as well. Nevertheless, I continue frantically drawing the magic circle on the ground because what I want the most right now is to see him.

I don’t deserve to be a high-ranking goddess anymore...

The instant I say Seiya’s name aloud, the magic circle glows, illuminating the dim room until a Hero emerges from the light.

“Seiya...!”

This is the third time I’ve summoned Seiya. As always, Seiya Ryuuguuin has the body of a model, which is complemented by his gallant features and—What the...?!

That’s when I notice his attire is different from usual. Seiya is usually wearing clothes you’d wear around the house, like a T-shirt, but this time he’s wearing a

camouflage uniform. He looks just like a military soldier.

“Um... Seiya...! I know this is sudden and all, but what’s up with your clothes?”

“Body armor. This is a bulletproof vest. Incidentally, I’m also wearing a stab-proof vest underneath. I realized that when you summon me, I can only bring what I’m wearing with me to the spirit world and other parallel worlds, so I’ve been wearing this body armor every day, twenty-four/seven, in preparation for my summoning.”

“Y-you were wearing all that?! You seriously spent every day of your normal life in Japan wearing heavy body armor?!”

“Yes. The police did question me from time to time, though.”

Y-yeah, I’m sure he must have looked suspicious! But...it’s perfect! This cautiousness of his is exactly what we need! While he may be only level 1, it’s still a huge relief.

Seiya surveys the area, looks at Cerceus, then knits his brow.

“Oh. Hello, Seiya, good sir! Long time no see! How have you been?”

Seiya ignores the man lowering his head to him and says to me: “This isn’t the spirit world, is it? I assume it’s a parallel world.”

“Yes, Seiya! Actually, we’re in big trouble! We’re—”

But Seiya holds his hand to my face.

“I’ve already figured out what’s going on. You can’t return to the spirit world, which is why you summoned me to a parallel world instead of the usual chamber, and you’re in danger. I can easily imagine what led to this as well.”

That’s Seiya for you! Not only did he come prepared with body armor, but it sounds like he already figured out that Mersais attacked us! Ha-ha! He’s like a detective!

But as I stare at him in admiration, he looks back at me with reproach.

“Rista, you messed up again and angered the gods of the heart, didn’t you? They must have sent you to this parallel world as punishment.”

“What the...?! No!!”

“Then you must have run off to this parallel world to elope with Cerceus. Am I right?”

“What?! No! In fact, you couldn’t be more wrong!”

“Hm... Hold on. Is that even the real Cerceus?”

““What?!””

Cerceus and I are taken aback.

“You’re almost certainly Rista, since you’re the one who summoned me, but this Cerceus could be an impostor.”

“Wh-what?! No! I’m the real Cerceus!”

“Exactly what an impostor would say. Prove you’re really him in twenty words or less.”

“I’m the owner of Café du Cerceus! I took care of Jonde and Kiriko! Please believe me!”

I listen to their exchange in utter amazement.

He’s nothing like a detective! All he’s doing is imagining every possibility! There goes not being worried!

“S-Seiya, no! Mersais finally attacked the spirit world—you know, the thing you were really worried about?!”

“Oh. I didn’t think you’d still be in one piece if that happened, so... Hm... I guess we can forget about Cerceus being an impostor for now.”

“I keep telling him I’m the real Cerceus... Why doesn’t he believe me...?”

Ignoring the disheartened Divine Blade, Seiya says:

“Rista, I need you to explain to me everything that happened. Down to the last detail. But make sure to keep it concise. You have ten seconds.”

“Y-you’ve gotta be kidding me!”

I end up explaining things while Cerceus continues to keep watch at the window.

...I tell him about how Mersais, Zet, and a woman who claimed to be a former

Hero attacked us.

...I tell him about how Cerceus and I found ourselves in Gaeabrande after waking up.

...I tell him about how the gates I make only connect us to the underworld and not the spirit world.

Although I couldn't do it within ten seconds, I explained the situation as quickly as I could.

"So now we're hiding from some dragonewts who are carrying weapons imbued with Chain Destruction!"

Seiya cautiously approaches the window and peeks outside. Then, after using the rotting furniture in the room to create a barricade in front of the door, he approaches me once more and...

Bonk!

"Ouch!"

He suddenly hits me on the head!

"Could you have possibly summoned me at a worse time? If a dragonewt finds us, I'm going to be killed on the spot. It's like you *want* this body armor to go to waste."

"I-I'm sorry!"

"See? What did I tell you? You made him angry."

Bonk! Seiya's fist rains down on the smug Divine Blade's head as well.

"Ow! What did you hit *me* for?!"

"Just felt like it... Anyway, Rista, open a gate. We have to get out of here."

"B-but I told you already! I can only open a gate to the underworld! And there was some creepy weirdo there with a hollow face that tried to eat Cerceus!"

"Yeah! That place is dangerous!"

But Seiya's expression doesn't change. He stoops before the window and focuses his attention on what's happening outside while saying: "That won't be

a problem. I'll come up with a plan while Cerceus is being eaten."

"What?! How is me being eaten not a problem?!"

"At any rate, that underworld place is probably still preferable to this one. That person you ran into didn't have Chain Destruction, right?"

"Oh yeah! Now that you mention it, she didn't!"

"We won't have to worry about dying in the underworld, which already makes it safer than here."

"A-are you sure about this? I'd rather not go back..."



I've never seen Cerceus look more discontent, but Seiya has a point. All of a sudden, Seiya, who's looking out the window, lowers his voice.

"A dragonewt's coming. Rista, hurry."

"O-okay!"

We swiftly slip through the gate right as the dragonewt approaches the door.

"...Hmph. So this is the underworld. Foggy."

Seiya nonchalantly mutters. While we may have gotten away from the dragonewts, we still have to deal with all of this fog. Plus...

"Sluuuuuurp."

I suddenly hear the eerie sound of some creature licking its lips, only to discover that the hollow-faced individual is slowly walking this way.

"I-it's her!"

She throws herself at Cerceus as a long, grotesque tongue crawls out of her jet-black hole.

"Eek! Seiya, help me!"

Cerceus screams before hiding behind the level-1 Hero. Seiya, however, doesn't even flinch as he calmly asks: "What do you want?"

"I want to lick, lick, lick the god."

"Okay. Knock yourself out."

Seiya then kicks Cerceus over!

"Gwah?!"

Cerceus groans as he tumbles across the ground until he stops right in front of the hollow-faced creature with the long tongue.

Lick, lick, lick, lick lick lick lick lick.

"Oooooooooooooooooo! Heeeeeeeelp meeeeeeeee!"

"S-S-Seiya?! Is Cerceus going to be okay?!"

"Gods don't die. He'll be fine."

“B-but—*gag*. This is just d-disgusting!”

Lick lick, lick. Liiick. Lick lick. Liiick.

Cerceus shouts and cries as the creature relentlessly licks his body. Seiya crosses his arms while observing him with a cold gaze.

...After a few minutes, Cerceus’s entire body is dripping with saliva. He looks like a shivering fawn that was just born.

“Hey, uh... You okay, Cerceus?”

“*Sniffle!* I’m sticky...and feel gross...and... *Sniffle!*”

“Seiya! Cerceus is crying, but I think he’s okay!”

“That’s good.”

“Do I look *okay* to you?! I’m all gross now!”

Cerceus angrily cries, but...

“Ah, I’m satisfied. Satisfied, satisfied, satisfied.”

The creature gleefully retracts her long tongue.

“Hm? She just wanted to lick him? I guess she really didn’t have any intention of killing us, unlike those dragonewts.”

“She even repeats herself two or three times, so we don’t have to worry about missing anything she says. While I can’t say for certain yet, she probably isn’t a threat.”

“I-I really hope you’re right...”

Just then...

“Excuse me? I apologize for Hohzuo.”

I hear a well-projected, feminine voice. When I turn around, I see a woman with violet hair. She has double-edged eyelids and a defined nose. Other than the jewel on her forehead, she appears to be an ordinary, beautiful woman. She lifts the hem of her gray dress and bows to Seiya and me.

“Ristarte and Seiya Ryuuguuin, correct? I appreciate all you have done for us.”

“...?! How do you know our names?!”

A-and “I appreciate all you have done for us”? I’m pretty sure this is the first time we’ve ever met...

She breaks into a smile and pulls a hand towel out from her dress’s breast pocket.

“Cercean, please use this to wipe the saliva off your body.”

“Th-thanks.”

She even appears to know Cercean’s name. After giving him the hand towel, she turns around and looks at the hollow-faced individual.

“You were drawn to his blinding divine aura and lost control of yourself. Isn’t that right, Hohzuo?”

The hollow-faced creature then bashfully scratches her head. I approach the woman.

“H-hey, uh... You are...?”

“I apologize for not introducing myself sooner. I am Unoporta. Our Lord Hathies asked me to bring you to the Shrine of the Six Realms.”

“Your Lord...? The Lord of the Underworld?”

“He will explain things to you once we arrive. Please, come this way.”

She begins to walk away, but I slightly hesitate and look at Seiya.

“Seiya! What should we do? She doesn’t seem like a bad person...”

“Usually, I’d want to train until I leveled up enough before going, but it’d be days before we could meet this Lord of the Underworld if I did that.”

“We can’t make him wait that long! Plus, we need to find out what’s going on!”

“All right. Don’t let your guard down, though.”

We begin following the woman named Unoporta. While walking, I notice the fog clearing up the farther we go.

“What the...? The fog is dissipating.”

“We only have fog during the day in the underworld.”

“Oh...”

But what becomes visible to us is a bloodred sky. And surrounding us as we walk down the gray stone pavement are wriggling plant-like individuals, giant rabbits, and people with only one giant eye instead of two normal-sized eyes. The monstrous creatures stare at us as they chat.

“I think that’s a god.”

“Ooo! Divine aura! It’s divine aura...! Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee!”

“Mm-hmm. I’d love to sink my teeth into that!”

I-is it just me, or are they saying some unsettling things?

I start to get scared, so I grab on to the hem of Seiya’s shirt. Unoporta looks back at me.

“There is no need to worry. They mean no harm. If anything, the people of the underworld feel a great deal of fondness for deities.”

“R-really?”

I hope that’s true, because right now I feel like Unoporta is the only decent person in this bizarre world. All of a sudden, Cerceus approaches Unoporta, who is walking ahead of us, and returns the hand towel she lent him.

“Thanks for letting me use this! I really appreciate it!”

Cerceus flashes his pearly white teeth with a refreshing smile.

“I never expected to run into such a wonderful young lady like you in the underworld!”

What is wrong with this guy?! First, he was trembling in his boots because he was afraid to return to the underworld, and now he’s flirting with a local?!

Unoporta suddenly comes to a stop and faces Cerceus, who is pathetically trying to act smooth while blushing. Is she actually enjoying his company? Y-you’ve gotta be kidding me! Don’t tell me a beautiful woman like this has taken a liking to Cerceus!

But at the very next moment...

“Blooorgh!”

With a deep grunt, she regurgitates a tsunami of scarlet liquid onto Cerceus's face, painting it red!

"Eeeeeeeeeek!"

"I-I'm so sorry!"

Unoporta promptly apologizes while Cerceus screams.

"I have a habit of vomiting blood from time to time..."

"I don't know if I'd call that a 'habit'! Are you okay?!"

I ask in surprise, but Unoporta wipes the blood from the corners of her mouth while gracefully smiling.

"Yes, I'm perfectly healthy."

Since when do healthy people randomly vomit blood?! What's going on here?!

"Groan..." First, saliva. Now, blood. Great..."

After handing Cerceus the towel back, she gazes at him with rapt attention as he wipes his face, on the verge of tears.

"Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee... Ah, how good it feels to be overflowing with HP again..."

"What the...?! Unoporta, what did you just say?!"

"O-oh, nothing! Come on, Ristarte! My Lord is waiting!"

She picks up her pace, trying to play it off. I turn to Seiya and whisper: "H-hey, don't you think she's acting a little suspicious?"

"Extremely suspicious. However, Cerceus is the only one who's suffering so far, so let's use him as a meat shield while we keep an eye out for anything else suspicious."

"Good idea."

"Hey! I can hear you, you know!"

We ignore Cerceus as always and continue to follow Unoporta. Before long, we find ourselves in front of a massive building made of obsidian under the

bloodred sky.

“This is the Shrine of the Six Realms, where the Lord of the Underworld resides.”

It reminds me of a tombstone, which sends a shiver down my spine. Seiya observes it in silence for a few moments, but he soon boldly strolls through the gate. Glowstones illuminate the interior like lamps, making it surprisingly bright. As we walk down the path behind Unoportia, I see unusual ornaments, sculptures, and even stuffed specimens of mysterious creatures I’ve never seen before. While an eerie sight, it still beats being outside where all those bizarre critters are. Eventually, Unoportia stops in front of a hinged double door. Hathies, the Lord of the Underworld, must be in there.

It feels almost like we’re about to battle a Demon Lord...

But before I can even brace myself for what comes next, Unoportia opens the door. He sits atop a throne made of animal bones at the end of a gray carpet with a presence no different from a Demon Lord.

“...Come forward.”

His voice is slightly higher than I expected, but I can feel it rumble in the pit of my stomach. My footsteps are timid as I follow Unoportia.

“I am the Lord of the Underworld, Hathies—he who passively observes this realm.”

Only when I get closer do I finally realize that Hathies’s face, slightly hidden behind the strands of beads dangling from his crown, is completely white. Cerceus and I exchange glances, then nod with evident satisfaction.

“I am glad you could make it, survivors of the ruined spirit world—Goddess of Healing, Ristarte, and God of Swords, Cerceus.”

What?! “R-ruined”?! As in destroyed?!

A Fresh Start

After hearing those devastating words drip from Hathies's tongue, I nearly scream:

"Wh-wh-what do you mean, the spirit world was destroyed?!"

"The tremendous powers of Atrocity, which rival even those of the God of Creation, have twisted all three thousand worlds. All of the deities vanished along with the spirit world when it became ground zero."

—Th-there's no way...!

"The underworld was affected as well, of course. The spirit world and the underworld were once sealed off from each other until space itself was distorted, granting you all passage."

Can the Lord of the Underworld see into the future like Ishtar? He speaks with the unwavering cadence of an omniscient deity. I'm shocked. Cerceus, on the other hand, stamps his feet in frustration by my side.

"Dammit all! Does that mean Café du Cerceus is out of business?!"

"What is wrong with you?! Aria, Ishtar, Adenela—they're all gone!"

"O-oh, yeah... You're right... Hmm... What are we going to do?!"

Crestfallen, Cerceus grips his head with both hands. Seiya then places a hand on his shoulder.

"Cerceus, don't worry about the café."

"S-Seiya? Wait. A-are you trying to cheer me up?"

"You would have gone out of business regardless of what happened."

"...?! Was that supposed to make me feel better?!"

Cerceus is on the verge of tears, but I'm in no mental state to deal with him

right now. The spirit world was destroyed. Not only did I lose my home, but I lost my loved ones as well.

Aria...! Ishtar...!

Cerceus and I tremble before the grim news, but as always, Seiya remains calm.

“Rista, stop blindly trusting people you’ve just met.”

“S-Seiya Ryuuguuin! How dare you speak in such a way before our Lord!”

Unoporta is flustered by Seiya’s rude behavior, but even then, he points at Cerceus and me while regarding the underworld ruler with a stern gaze.

“I heard there was a ‘spirit vault’ in the spirit world, so wouldn’t these two have disappeared if the spirit world really had been destroyed?”

Oh yeah...! Now that he mentions it...!

Cerceus and I were quick to trust this so-called Lord of the Underworld, but Seiya opens my eyes, and I feel slightly calmer than I did a second ago. Our host wears a slight smile.

“It appears my wording may have been misleading. It is true that the powers of Atrocity warped the spirit world, causing it to disappear. More precisely speaking, however, the spirit world still exists in a dimension different from ours. The spirit vault is in that dimension as well, which is why they still exist.”

The spirit world still exists in another dimension?! I don’t really understand what’s going on, but...

“Does that mean we’ll be able to return to the spirit world if we fix this spatial distortion?!”

After I shout with a faint glimmer of hope, the Lord of the Underworld faintly nods.

“Returning the three thousand worlds to normal, along with the spirit world, is a simple and straightforward process. You must defeat the Goddess of Atrocity, Mersais.”

“Wh-where is she?!”

After slowly closing his eyes, Hathies says:

“In the parallel world of Kirsosa—or should I say, the warped world of Kirsosa? Mersais currently reigns over that world.”

“The warped world of Kirsosa...! If we go there and defeat her, then...!”

Then surely Aria and Ishtar can be revived as well!

“However, reaching Kirsosa will not be an easy task. The divine gates you deities can freely create have been warped as well. They will not function normally anymore.”

“Ah...!”

He’s right! I can only open gates to Gaeabrande and the underworld! Not only will we not be able to defeat Mersais, we won’t even be able to go to her realm!

“O-oh, come on. Seriously? So there really is no way to save the spirit world...”

Cerceus lets out a pained groan, but the underworld lord softly smirks.

“There is a way to reach Kirsosa, though the method will be extremely difficult.”

“Wh-what is it?!”

“You must restore three warped worlds, which are of S-rank or higher, to their original states. Doing so would mitigate the overall distortion and allow you to open a divine gate to Kirsosa. These worlds being difficult to save means that they play a major role between dimensions, for together, they possess the key to the fate of all worlds.”

“We only have to turn three warped worlds back to normal...?”

“The first is the S+ ranked warped world of Gaeabrande, the second is the SS+ ranked warped world of Ixphoria, and the last world is the SSS-ranked warped world of Galvaoth. Although these worlds may be warped, your close ties to them should allow you to open a divine gate to them.”

Even Ixphoria’s been warped?! But...

“I tried to open a gate to Ixphoria earlier, but I couldn’t...”

“Your divine gate can currently only connect to Gaeabrande, which should be the easiest to save. First, you must fix this world. Then the gate to Ixphoria shall open and Galvaoth after that.”

“O-oh, okay!”

Hm? Hold on. I’ve never heard of any parallel world called Galvaoth...

I suddenly look up at Hathies and notice he’s staring at Cerceus. He points his staff at the muscular deity.

“God of Swords, Cerceus, you are linked to the parallel world of Galvaoth by fate.”

“What?! M-me?!”

“After saving the warped world of Ixphoria, open a divine gate to Galvaoth—the world you once lived in, in a past life.”

“The world I lived in when I was human...?!”

I’ll admit I’m a bit surprised to hear that, but Cerceus looks like his soul just left his body. The Lord of the Underworld continues:

“This is also why both the God of Swords, Cerceus, and the Goddess of Healing, Ristarte, survived. To put it in simple yet extreme terms, it is because neither of you are that divine.”

““Whaaaaaat?!””

The ice-cold diss renders us speechless. Apparently insulting us wasn’t Hathies’s intention, however.

“Both of you were once human. Since you were not pure deities born into the spirit world, you were not swallowed by the distortion.”

Ohhh! Now I get it! I’m glad we weren’t being insulted! I actually feel a little better after hearing everything Hathies had to say as well.

“It sounds like we have a long road ahead of us, but there’s still hope! So first we need to save Gaeabrande, right?”

But Cerceus shakes his head.

“Wait. What even are warped worlds?”

“...They’re probably similar to what I saw when I faced the Death Keeper.”

Seiya quietly mutters. When we fought the Death Keeper in Ixphoria, he used Mersais’s powers to create a world where the “Reckless Seiya” actually defeated the Demon Lord.

“In other words, that was all just preparation for this. She’s prudent and well prepared.”

It feels kind of weird hearing Seiya say someone else is “well prepared,” but... yeah... I guess that was the first warped world. Mersais was already planning on destroying the spirit world ever since we returned to Ixphoria.

Hathies nods in response to Seiya’s assumption.

“A world becomes warped once its timeline is distorted. The warped worlds are twisted to Mersais’s favor.”

There’s one more thing that’s bothering me. I speak up, practically talking to myself.

“I wonder if that has something to do with the Divine Hero being able to use Berserk: Phase Four...”

“Mersais’s former Hero...”

“W-wait! Mersais was the one who originally summoned her?!”

The Lord of the Underworld knows that? Hathies’s clairvoyance might be even greater than Ishtar’s.

“That Hero is one who should not exist, for long ago, her soul was shattered before vanishing from existence.”

Oh! Aria said something to that effect back in the colosseum!

“However, Mersais used her powers of Atrocity to bring her Hero back from a warped world where she did exist.”

In other words, she came from a world where Zet taught her Phase Four as well?! Th-this is getting really complicated! I’m getting a headache just from trying to process everything!

When I glance in Seiya's direction, he's furrowing his brow.

"Let's say there are thousands—tens of thousands—of warped worlds. How possible is it for one of them to contain a human capable of mastering Phase Four? Zet said that mastering even Phase Three wasn't possible for a human, which I can understand, since I personally know how dangerous Berserk Mode is."

"Seiya Ryuuguuin, you possess great talent. However, the Divine Hero has a rare talent which separates her from all others. If you are a one-in-a-billion phenomenon, then she would be a miracle that only occurs once in a billion years."

"O-once in a billion years?! Does that mean she's stronger than Seiya?!"

"The Divine Hero is the strongest Hero the spirit world has ever known. I mean no offense when I say that she simply has no equal."

Seriously?! Someone that strong is with Mersais?!

"Despite her unparalleled talents, however, she originally raised her Berserk status past the Third Phase, thus destroying her soul."

Hathies sharply creases his eyes and looks up at the ceiling high overhead.

"I can somewhat understand Mersais's resentment. In a way, it is only natural for her to harbor a grudge against the spirit world, and that hatred must have awakened the Goddess of Atrocity's true powers. Most staggering of all, however, is her powerful vindictiveness, for she searched thousands—perhaps millions—of warped worlds to find one where the Divine Hero was still alive even after surpassing Phase Three as a berserker."

He then returns his attention to us and grins.

"The Hero with Mersais may look human, but her soul has been swallowed by a chaotic aura. There is no longer anything 'human' about her."

Groan... Defeating Mersais already sounds hard enough, but now we have to fight some all-powerful Hero, too?!

Overcome with worry, I move to Seiya's side. But when I look up, he's simply staring at Hathies with his usual indifference.

“Hm... Okay. Let’s say you weren’t lying during your long-winded monologue.”

He still doesn’t believe Hathies?!

I am once again astounded by just how much of a skeptic Seiya is. He continues:

“How, exactly, do you turn warped worlds back to normal?”

“You must destroy that which warps the world. The source of the distortion.”

I suddenly think back to what that dragonewt said.

“N-now that I think about it, a dragonewt in warped Gaeabrande said that the Dragon Lord defeated the Demon Lord instead of Seiya!”

“Distortion is akin to a disaster. In other words, you simply must remove the various sources of evil that rule these worlds, similar to what you have been doing up until now.”

“D-do you mean Gaeabrande will return to normal if we defeat the Dragon Lord...?!?”

At the very least, we have a goal now. But Seiya casts a dubious look at the Lord of the Underworld.

“Hmph. You’re awfully cooperative.”

“Because those who dwell in the underworld, including myself, rely on the gods. We only wish for the spirit world to return to normal.”

I vaguely remember Unoporta saying to me that she appreciates everything we’ve done for them. What exactly did she mean?

“Um... What’s the relationship between the underworld and the spirit world?”

“I guess you could call it...supply and demand.”

“Uh...huh...”

I have no idea what he means, so I’d like him to clarify, but Seiya appears to be more interested in fixing the warped worlds.

“By the way, what happens to the monsters and people you kill in these warped worlds? Does it affect anything after the worlds return to normal?”

“Whether they die by your hand or by other means matters not. They will come back to life. Technically speaking, once the world returns to normal, it will be as if the events you underwent to save it never occurred.”

“I see. If what you’re saying is true, it sounds like I can kill anyone and everyone without having to worry about the consequences.”

I-is it just me or does this sound like a terrorist meetup?! But I’m sure this is all extremely important!

“Your journey shall be rife with difficulties. However, you must save the distorted Gaeabrande first if you hope to reach Kirsosa, defeat Mersais, and restore the spirit world.”

Hathies slowly stands from his throne.

“Now, go! Show me how two gods—who survived, thanks to their divine fortune—and their Hero struggle against fate in the warped world of Gaeabrande! Show me how long you can weather Mersais’s powers of Atrocity!”

Hathies raises a sharp-clawed hand into the air as if to signal the start of our mission. However...

“No,” says the Cautious Hero.

“S-Seiya?!”

“Do you seriously expect me to suddenly go to a distorted parallel world without any preparation whatsoever?”

Ahhh! I feel like it’s been so long since I’ve heard those words!

“My level was reset. While I remember the initial steps to the Techniques of Destruction and how to use Berserk Mode, I lost all my other skills.”

“B-but you can still turn into a berserker...! That’s great!”

While I’m thrilled that he can still use his Techniques of Destruction and Berserk Mode, which have been carved into his soul, Seiya’s face is stern as ever.

“What are you talking about? Doubling or even tripling my extremely low

attack power isn't going to change anything. I have to raise my level from the ground up, or it's pointless."

"So what do you want to do?"

After a few moments of silence, Seiya says:

"From now on, we'll be using the underworld as our base of operations while we save the warped worlds."

"Seriously?! *This* is going to be our base?! A place like *this*?!"

Hathies's eyebrow twitches as I scream in utter astonishment.

"Oh? 'A place like this,' hm?"

"O-oh, um...! 'A *wonderful* place like this' is what I meant, of course! Ha-ha-ha!"

Yikes! I better be careful about what I say!

"Our end goal is defeating Mersais and restoring the spirit world to its original state, right? She's powerful enough to destroy the spirit world, and her Hero has no equal. We must take extraordinary measures to face such powerful enemies. In other words..."

Seiya sharpens his gaze.

"We need to find that first step here in the underworld."

"Heh-heh-heh..."

Hathies chuckles.

"You are already concerning yourself with the final battle against Mersais even while the warped Gaeabrande remains unaddressed? How wise. So that overly cautious personality of yours is your virtue as well."

What the...?! He even knows about Seiya's personality?!

"How does time flow in the underworld compared to the surface?"

"The time of this world conforms with the spirit world. The time difference is one one-hundredth that of parallel worlds."

"We should be able to take our time, then."

“Heh-heh-heh. Both humans and gods residing in the underworld? While unprecedented, such a concept is most intriguing.”

The Lord of the Underworld may be laughing, but I’m on pins and needles. Hold on! Are we seriously going to live in the underworld?! I’m pretty sure this place isn’t going to be all sunshine and rainbows like the spirit world! Will we be okay?!

My gut feeling is immediately proven right. Hathies turns his gaze to Cerceus and me.

“However, living here would prove difficult for a god. You could face... humiliation that you may find unbearable.”

“‘H-humiliation’?!”

“Hold up! What kind of humiliation are we talking about?!”

While Cerceus and I panic...

“I’m fine with that.”

““Hey!””

We scream in unison, taken aback by Seiya’s immediate reply. Unoporta, who had been standing in silence the entire time, suddenly blushes.

“A god is going to be staying in the underworld...! Hee-hee-hee-hee...! How wonderful! Ah, what a wonderful surprise!”

She slowly licks her lips while smiling to herself.

Eek! What did she mean by that?!

...Cerceus and I timidly shrink back as we find ourselves in an ominous new world. I have been feeling nothing but anxiety and fear ever since Seiya said he wanted to use the underworld as his base.



A New Type of Training

Even after our departure from the Shrine of the Six Realms, people of the underworld are still coming and going down the stone path under the crimson sky. I was really distracted by their bizarre appearances on the way here, but when I actually pay attention to my surroundings, I notice there are houses here and there. Some are brick while others are stone. There doesn't seem to be any sense of unity with how they were built. There's even a store with a sign out front, but it looks like whatever it says was written in hieroglyphics, so I can't read it.

"Are we seriously going to be living here from now on? I have a bad feeling about this... I just want to go home..."

Seiya shoots Cerceus a chilling gaze the moment he complains.

"You're free to go off on your own if you want."

"Wh-what?!"

"But Seiya...! We won't be able to go to Galvaoth without Cerceus!"

"Come on, don't leave me here all alone! This place is scary!"

"How pathetic can you be?"

Seiya's right. I feel secondhand embarrassment just looking at Cerceus. Regardless, we need to save the warped world of Galvaoth, where Cerceus once lived as a human, after we deal with Gaeabrande and Ixphoria. I guess we're not going to have to worry about that for a while, though...

"We talked about it a little before, but I have to wonder what kind of idiot Cerceus was in his past life."

"Who says I was an idiot?! Besides, did you already forget that Hathies said Galvaoth was a high-ranked world?!"

“And...?”

“And I survived in that harsh environment! I must have been a famous military general in my past life! I just know it!”

“What do you think, Seiya?”

“Even if he was a general, he probably took an arrow to the ass and died.”

“Yeah, I would believe that.”

“Hey! Why does that have to be how I died?!”

Cerceus yells, but Seiya shakes his head.

“Anyway, we don’t have time to talk about ridiculous what-ifs right now.”

“So you’re going to start training, huh?”

“No. First, we need to secure food and shelter.”

Oh yeah! We don’t know a thing about this place, after all! We definitely need to do something about food, clothing, and shelter!

“Um...”

I hear a woman’s voice behind me and turn around. Unoporta must have been listening to our conversation this entire time. She timidly says: “You can stay at my house if you want.”

“What?! Really?!”

“Of course. Please, come this way.”

“Thanks, Uno!”

She was acting kind of weird in the Shrine, but...she’s at least halfway decent compared to the other underworld denizens!

Perhaps feeling the same way, Seiya follows her without prying further. The eerie life-forms of the underworld mutter to themselves as we walk down the path following Uno. There are creatures with no heads, giants over ten meters tall, and even humanoid slimes that move like slugs. The blood-vomiting Unoporta seems completely normal compared to them.

“Bweh-heh-heh... Deities...”

“Ohhh! I can feel the divine auraaaaaa!”

A few of the creatures try to get our attention, but when Unoporta raises her hand, they immediately cower away. When we first met her, she said Hathies had ordered her to come get us, so he must really trust her. The other creatures probably respect her as well.

Around ten or so minutes after leaving Hathies’s shrine, we find ourselves outside of town in the suburbs. It’s a very rural area with hardly anyone around. It’s somewhat relaxing, despite my still not being used to the blood-colored sky and there being countless plants I’ve never seen before.

“Do you see that over there? That’s my house.”

Unoporta points to a building standing tall in the distance. Vines crawl up its walls just like an old Western-style residence.

L-looks like a house a vampire would love to live in.

“What a creepy house.”

“S-Seiya?!”

You shouldn’t say things like that even if it’s true!

But right as I’m about to scold him for being so outspoken, I notice that Unoporta doesn’t seem to really care. She smiles, in fact.

“I live here with my brother.”

“You have a brother?”

“I do. Oh! He’s right over there, actually...”

After strolling through the rusted gateway, Unoporta points to the garden, where a man is watering the flowers.

“Hey, Uno.”

He flashes a refreshing smile the moment he sees us. His hair is short, but it’s the same violet color as Unoporta’s, and he has a jewel-like ornament embedded in his forehead. If he were a human, I’d guess he was in his late twenties.

“You must be Seiya, Ristarte, and Cerceus. I am Unoporta’s older brother,

Dueporta. Call me Due.”

Due extends his hand toward us with a smile like a friend. Seiya exercises caution and doesn’t take his hand, so I shake Due’s hand in his place.

“N-nice to meet you! I’m looking forward getting to know each other!”

“Ristarte...”

Due quietly gazes into my eyes, and my heart skips a beat. Huh?! Wait! What?! What’s going on?! He suddenly lets go of my hand as he notices my inner panic.

“Oh, my apologies. I was just a little touched to meet you all after everything you’ve done for us.”

“About that. I was wondering—”

Curious, I attempt to ask Uno what exactly they mean by that when...

“Blaaargh!”

“What the—?! She’s throwing up blood again!”

Despite becoming a fresh-blood fountain once more, Uno calmly wipes the corners of her mouth with her hand.

“Please excuse me. I would be grateful if you treated these occurrences as simple sneezes.”

“B-but it’s nothing like sneezing! You’re puking blood!”

Ignoring my outburst, Uno casually says to her brother: “Due, Ristarte and the others plan on staying in the underworld for a while, so I thought we could let them use the guest rooms...”

“That’s fine. Usually, we’d have to make a deal, but...”

“Huh? A ‘deal’?”

Due closes his eyes and ponders for a few moments until he casts a gaze at me and cheerfully smiles.

“All right. We’ll lend each of you a room to use as you please.”

Hm? What happened to the “deal”? Am I just so attractive that he simply gave

in? He has been passionately staring at me, or at least it feels that way. Maybe I'm just overthinking it, but he seems like a cheerful, handsome guy, so it doesn't bother me. At any rate, I feel like these siblings are, if nothing else, the most trustworthy people in the underworld... Or so I thought.

But out of nowhere...

"Bleh!h!"

Fresh blood spurts from the handsome young man's mouth.

"Ahhh! It runs in the family!"

While Cerceus and I tremble, Due wipes the blood from the corners of his mouth with a nonchalant air.

"Oops. My apologies. Oh, what's the matter with me? I've gone and coughed up blood in the middle of our conversation, ha-ha-ha!"

He's acting as if nothing happened—as if it was a harmless burp, but...*he threw up blood!!* I'm starting to think there's something wrong with these two, too! But after cleaning his face, Due has already regained the appearance of a handsome young man.

"Anyway, how about some supper? I'm not exactly sure what deities and humans like to eat, but you're welcome at our table."

"O-oh, um... Dinner..."

"Come. The dining room is this way."

The siblings end up taking us to a long, gorgeous table with candles lit on top. In the middle is a large pot of soup and loaves of bread on a plate.

"Eat to your heart's content."

It looks like you're supposed to dip the bread in the soup and eat it. I was worried that it'd be something grotesque and inedible, seeing as we're in the underworld, but I think I can handle this.

"Seiya, look! Bread! And it actually looks pretty good!"

But Seiya pokes Cerceus, who's by his side, on the shoulder.

"You first, Cerceus. Eat."

“Seriously...?!”

I whisper to the frightened god:

“Don’t worry! I used Appraise on it! It’s completely safe to eat!”

“I-I can trust you, right? A-all right, I’ll dig in first.”

Cerceus dips a piece of bread into the pot of soup, then slowly brings it to his mouth when...

“Wow! You were right! This is edible! In fact, it’s delicious!”

With that, he begins stuffing his face with bread. I try some as well, and he wasn’t lying. It’s good. The soup is kind of like cheese fondue.

Despite most likely using Appraise on it as well, Seiya sniffs the bread before tearing off the tiniest piece possible to taste for poison. By the time we clear our plates, Seiya is finally starting to eat as well. After filling up, he suddenly says: “Good. While I have some reservations about the safety and hygiene standards of this place, we were able to secure the bare necessities: food and shelter.”

“S-Seiya?! Due’s still here, you know!”

But Due cheerfully grins, and Seiya, being Seiya, shows no signs of concern, either. He suddenly rises from his chair.

“It’s time to train. I have to make sure I can at least crush a dragonewt with a single hand.”

“Huh?! A-already?!”

Cerceus is obviously not excited. He’s probably expecting Seiya to ask him to spar. Just then, Uno comes back with another pitcher of water and suggests: “How about resting in your new rooms tonight? You can start training tomorrow.”

“No. I want to level up quickly, and if possible, reach max level within the next few days.”

M-max level?! Well...I guess there’s no time limit this round, and this is an S+ ranked world, so it makes sense. I’m not really excited about staying in the

underworld that long, but Seiya should probably take his time to prepare.

Seiya looks at Cerceus, who seems very uncomfortable, and mutters: “Cerceus would make an inefficient training partner. I need someone more useful.”

Cerceus’s expression makes him seem relieved yet depressed at the same time. Seiya asks Uno: “Is there anyone strong in the underworld?”

“There isn’t really anyone here who’s physically strong, but there are plenty of people who can perform mystic skills.”

“Oh?”

Something twinkles in Seiya’s eye.

“S-Seiya, come here! We need to talk!”

After calling him over, I whisper into his ear so that Uno and Due can’t hear.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to get someone from the underworld to teach you new moves! These aren’t deities from the spirit world! Don’t you think this is a little dangerous?!”

“Going to a warped world unprepared is more dangerous. Besides, you heard what I told Hathies, right? I need to find some way to defeat Mersais and her Hero, whenever that happens, while we’re in the underworld.”

“I-I get that, but...!”

Seiya looks away from me and focuses on Uno and Due.

“Do you two not know any skills?”

The siblings thereupon exchange glances, then mirthfully smile. After lowering her head, Uno looks up at Seiya with a gentle gaze.

“Our skills would not be of any use to you anymore, Seiya.”

“Okay.”

Neither of them mentioned what skills those are, but Seiya doesn’t press them for answers. If they say they’re useless to Seiya, then they’re probably not combat skills.

“Seiya, may I suggest you first have Cerceus and Ristarte learn some skills from the underworld?”

““What?!””

Cerceus and I shudder at the unexpected proposal because the conversation suddenly became about us! Seiya nods, then says: “Yes... I suppose I should use these immortal deities and see what happens, first...”

“What are we, your guinea pigs?!”

In spite of our astonishment, Uno and Due continue the conversation like nothing happened.

“Due, how about Xul Luxu on Third Avenue?”

“Yeah, I’m sure Xul Luxu could increase their divine powers.”

“H-hold up. Do you mean something similar to Order?”

Cerceus timidly poses this question to Due. We’ve lost our ability to use Order now that the spirit world is gone. Despite this being an emergency, I can’t awaken my healing power to its full potential, and I can’t summon my wings, either. Cerceus is in the same boat, obviously.

“You are talking about lifting the restrictions that limit your divine powers, correct? Xul Luxu’s skills are slightly different from that. ‘Tapping into your latent potential’ would perhaps be a more appropriate way of putting it.”

““Tapping into our latent potential’...?”

“Yes. Once you learn Xul Luxu’s special move and realize your potential, your current attributes will most certainly multiply many times over.”

“S-seriously?!”

Cerceus looks kind of happy, and I’m feeling somewhat excited as well.

“So it’s like going into Berserk Mode but for gods, huh! I-is it dangerous?”

Raising Berserk Mode’s phase too high would spiritually destroy a human, so I can’t help but worry about the price I would have to pay to increase my stats. However...

“Your appearance will change slightly, but there won’t be any detrimental

effects upon your mind and body. At least in the underworld.”

“Wh-what do you mean ‘at least in the underworld’?”

“Our Lord’s special powers affect all of those in the underworld, but once you descend into a lower realm, you risk losing control of your newfound powers, so I do not recommend using them anywhere but here.”

“Huh...? In other words, we’re only going to be stronger in the underworld?”

“Yes. While it may seem to be a roundabout way of doing things, you should be more than qualified to be Seiya’s training partners if both of you raise your attributes this way. This should shorten how long Seiya has to train as well.”

Seiya ponders for a few moments before pointing at Cerceus and me.

“I understand where you’re coming from, but you’re grossly overestimating their skills. Multiplying zero by anything is still zero.”

“‘Z-zero’?! ”

I want to cry, but Uno gently smiles at Seiya.

“Even the weakest people still have attributes greater than zero. Even if Cerceus and Rista had all ones for attributes, Xul Luxu’s special move would increase those ones to tens.”

“A-are you saying our stats would multiply by ten?! ”

That’s insane! That’s even better than Berserk Mode!

But Seiya shakes his head.

“You’re being too generous. Their stats are more like 0.1 across the board.”

“That would still increase their attributes to 1 if they learned Xul Luxu’s special move.”

“What if they’re 0.01?”

“Then they would become 0.1.”

“Hey?! Enough with the decimals!” I shout.

You don’t use decimals when comparing stats! Cerceus and I may not be the strongest, but even our stats aren’t that low!

“All right, let’s go see this Xul-person.”

“Very well. Right this way, please.”

After bowing to her brother, Uno takes the lead and walks outside. I promptly thank Due for the meal, then follow her and Seiya as well.

When we head outside, the once-crimson sky is now gray. While I can’t see any stars or the moon, there’s just barely enough light outside that I can see what’s in front of me. I guess this is what night’s like in the underworld.

Uno heads in the complete opposite direction of the Shrine of the Six Realms for a while until she crosses a log bridge. Once across the bridge, I immediately notice a settlement up ahead. Tiled-roofed houses are illuminated by the lanterns sporadically hanging around the village. The doors, walls, and pillars painted red and yellow could be compared to Chinese architecture in Seiya’s world.

We look around, taking in the sights, while walking deeper into the settlement. Since it’s the middle of the night, I’d probably scream if some creepy underworld inhabitant suddenly appeared, but luckily, there’s no one in sight.

“We have arrived. This is Xul Luxu’s residence.”

Uno stops before a tile-roofed house that looks just like the others, the only difference being that this one is far more run-down than the rest. It looks like an abandoned haunted house from the outside. The door creaks open, revealing only a pitch-black abyss.

“Xul Luxu, are you home? It’s me, Unoporta.”

But there is no reply. I wonder if there’s nobody home until I hear a sudden rattle. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* A strange noise echoes all around when suddenly someone emerges from the darkness!

What’s this person’s problem?! I almost had a heart attack!

It’s a woman walking on her hands as her long hair dangles onto the floor. She looks over at us and grins before swiftly walking over to us like a spider.

“Eek?!”

“Ah?!”

Cerceus and I naturally scream! She looks up at us with her eyes goggling.

“This is Xul Luxu.”

Uno may be smiling, but I almost wet myself! Wh-wh-why is she walking around on her hands?!

“Xul Luxu, I was hoping you could teach your special move to the deities Cerceus and Ristarte.”

“Eeeeeee! I could never turn down a request from you, Unoporta.” she says with a twang.

She then takes the bottle of sake dangling at her hips, tilts her head to the side, and dexterously takes a sip. I instinctively ask: “H-hey, uh... Why are you doing a handstand?”

Xul Luxu thereupon lets out a shrill, booze-soaked chuckle.

“Hya-ha-ha-ha! All is one, yet all have two sides! Standing on your hands is truth! Eeeeeee! Being two sides of the same coin is the essence of the underworld itself!”

“Oh! Okay! That makes sense!”

That made absolutely no sense, but she frightens me, so I just went with it. Seiya suddenly pushes me out of the way and walks over to her.

“So what exactly is this special move of yours?”

“Eeeeeee. It temporarily reverses the possessor’s disposition. If a god becomes a demon god, their stats will increase as well.”

““A d-d-demon god?!””

Cerceus and I shout. H-hold on! This is the first we’ve heard anything about that! Xul Luxu brings her sake bottle to her lips, takes another sip, then smirks.

“Eeeeeee. But if you want me to teach you, we need to make a deal. I want all your HP.”

The Divine Blade's Revenge

Xul Luxu, still standing on her hands, eerily cackles.

“Eeeeeee. You must make a deal with the people of the underworld whenever you want something, for this is our way.”

As I stand in mute amazement, Uno suddenly jumps in.

“Ristarte, whenever you make a deal, you need to offer HP.”

“Um... So you need...my stamina? Is that what you mean?”

“No. It’s different in the underworld. To get straight to the point, you are about to be deeply humiliated.”

“What the...?! So this is the ‘deal’ that you and Due were talking about?!”

Uno nods solemnly. Xul Luxu then shouts:

“Eeeeeee! There’s no time to waste! Let’s get started!”

Wh-what kind of humiliation is this? Don’t tell me they’re going to do something lewd to me!!

“Eee. Raise both of your hands high into the air!”

I’m so scared that I can’t do it, so Seiya says: “Rista, we’re doing this to save the spirit world.”

“Er...”

There’s no way I can refuse when he puts it like that. B-besides, Xul Luxu’s standing on her hands anyway, so it’s not like she can really feel me up or anything...right?

Right as I timidly raise my hands into the air, Xul Luxu shouts: “Reverse!”

Up and down suddenly switch places, and before I even realize it, Xul Luxu is smiling right at me! Everything around me looks upside-down... Wait! Am I

standing on my hands?!

“Wh-what did you do to me?!”

I’m startled by the fact that I was forced into a handstand, but...is this supposed to be humiliating? If this is all it is, then— *Fwp*.

The hem of my skirt suddenly falls toward my chest, and a nice, cool breeze brushes against my crotch. While I can’t see it myself, I know exactly what’s happening. My underpants are on display for all to see.

“...?! Don’t look! Don’t loooooooooook!!”

Just imagining Seiya and Cerceus staring is so embarrassing that I scream! I try to get back to my feet, but I can’t move. This must be Xul Luxu’s special move. She and Uno watch, enraptured, as I freak out.

“Eeeeeee! What a wonderful feeling!”

“I can feel the HP slowly filling my body... What great delight...!”

“Wh-what is going on?!”

I look up at Seiya while I’m still in a handstand, only to find him nodding with evident satisfaction.

“I see. It appears they receive energy from seeing deities humiliate themselves.”

“Th-they’re getting off on seeing me embarrassed?!”

After a few brief moments, Uno solemnly declares: “Exactly. Here in the underworld, HP stands for Humiliation Points.”

“Humiliation *what*?!”

Why does my embarrassment give the people of the underworld energy?! This makes no sense! When I glance to my side, I notice Cerceus has been grinning at me.

“What do you think you’re lookin’ at!”

“Huh?! Nothing. I didn’t see your white panties.”

“What the...?! I can’t believe you!”

Xul Luxu suddenly waddles over to Cerceus, then...

“Reverse!”

Cerceus is forced into a handstand as well.

“M-m-me too?!”

“Eee. From now on, you two have to do as I say.”

I-is she going to humiliate me *again*?! Cerceus and I shudder when...

“Eeeeeee! Now I want you to say twenty palindromes in a row while standing on your hands.”

“H-hold on! Why do I have to play this stupid game with my panties still on display?!”

“Eee. If you can’t do it, the deal is off.”

Seiya clears his throat with an “ahem,” then glares at me with a piercing gaze as if to say, “Do it.” *Groan...* I’d rather take a brick to the head than do this, but...it’s for the sake of the spirit world! I have to!

“All right, then... Uh... ‘Level.’”

“Eee. Good. You’re next.”

“...‘MAX.’”

“Eee. No. Start over.”

I am honestly struck dumb by Cerceus’s reply.

“Cerceus?! ‘MAX’?! What the hell was that?!”

“S-sorry, it was just the first thing that popped into my head when you said ‘level,’ and I can’t think straight, since all the blood’s rushing to my head...”

He does have a point. All the blood is slowly rushing to my head, too! It hurts...and my partner’s an idiot! *Sigh*. You can do this, Rista. Stay calm. Do it for the spirit world!

“Um... ‘Mom.’”

“Hm... I’ll go with ‘Dad.’”

“Stats!”

“...‘B-banana’...?”

“That would be ‘ananab’ backward. Eee... Start over.”

Good lord! How stupid is this guy?! Discouraged, I ask Seiya: “H-hey, Seiya? Do you want to give it a try?”

“Of course, I don’t mind helping, but—”

“But deities give so much more HPeeeeeee.”

“Well, you heard her. Sorry.”

Ack! Why do we have to be the clowns?! I’ve gotten past my embarrassment and now only feel frustration and anger. Seiya, standing over my head, suddenly says: “You can do it, Rista. I believe in you.”

“Huh...?!”

Th-this has to be some kind of sick joke, right?! Seiya would never cheer me on...!

“O-okay! I’ve got this!”

The conditions couldn’t be any lousier. My panties are on display like a carnival sideshow, and all my blood is rushing to my head. Nevertheless, I continue to push forward thanks to Seiya’s encouragement, and I start the game back up.

“Sagas!”

“Wow.”

“Noon!”

“Night.’ ...Oops! Sorry, Rista...”

“Cerceus?! Stop screwing up!”

Cerceus keeps holding us back with all his mistakes, and we’re getting nowhere fast. Unoporta turns to me and says: “Ristarte, is it just me, or have you lost quite a bit of HP since you started?”

“Um... I can’t tell if I’ve lost or gained any Humiliation Points.”

“Oh, my apologies. I was talking about your Health Points. I was worried you were getting exhausted.”

“Ugh!! I’ve had enough of these confusing abbreviations! Yes, I am running out of stamina! How long do you think I’ve been standing on my hands for?!”

“Th-that’s what I thought. Xul Luxu, how about we take a break?”

“Fine. I already have eenough anyway.”

Phew! Thank goodness! We can finally rest! Or so I think until Seiya suddenly suggests to Xul Luxu: “No. That’d be a waste of time. You need to continue until you get it right.”

““Wh-what?!””

Cerceus and I scream, but Seiya looks back at me with a cold glare.

“Guys. I’m counting on you two.”

N-now I get it! He’s not cheering us on! He’s torturing us under the guise of support! We end up continuing without any rest after that... It takes fifteen whole minutes, but we somehow manage to say twenty palindromes in a row. And yet, I feel no sense of accomplishment. Only sadness. I feel like I lost something important as a goddess. But contrary to my depression...

“Eee. I haven’t had that much HP in forever.”

“Yes, it has been a while since I have felt this full.”

Both Xul Luxu and Uno seem really happy. Cerceus and I are finally freed from our handstands as well, so I deeply exhale and sink to the floor.

“So are you going to teach us how to become demons now or what?”

“Hm? What are you talking about? Eee... You have alreadyyy completed the ritual for Type: Opposite.”

“What?!”

“Eee... Not only was that humiliation, but it was also training to inherit the aura and move as well.”

“Does that mean we can turn into demons now?!”

“Eee. Get back into a handstand and chant your name backward.”

I get into a handstand like she suggests. My panties are still on display, but I don't care anymore!

Um... If I say my name backward, it should be...

“Etratsir!”

Poof! I am suddenly engulfed in smoke, and when it finally clears, I'm startled by my appearance. My pure white dress has transformed into black leather, and my arms and legs are slightly tan! I look like I've been lying out on the beach!

“Wh-wh-what happened to me?!”

“Ristarte, there is a full-length mirror over here if you would like to see yourself.”

When I look into the mirror Uno is motioning to, I freeze. It's a black leather dress with a gap for my cleavage, and my exposed skin is a little darker than usual. My lips look a lot more provocative as well. But what's most surprising are the bat-like wings growing out of my back! I even have a tail sprouting out of my lower back! I look kind of like a pixie!

“S-so this is what it's like to be a demon! This is actually kind of sexy...!”



I was actually worried about what was going to happen, but I like this. It makes all that time doing a handstand seem worth it!

“Hey, Seiya! Look! I’m a demon! What do you want me to do first?”

“I don’t need you for anything. Go to sleep.”

“What was the point of working so hard if you’re just going to ignore me like you usually do?!”

“Just because your stats increased a little, it still doesn’t make you a fighter.”

“I-I guess, but...!”

“This will be my main focus for now.”

Cerceus breathes heavily as he stares at my new form.

“O-okay! Let’s do this! ...Suecrec!”

Poof! A puff of smoke swallows his body, and when it finally clears, Cerceus is standing completely still. However, this isn’t the usual Divine Blade.

While he also has slightly tanned skin, what really stands out is the fact that he’s even more ripped than usual. Plus, for some reason he’s wearing a black leather jacket, dangling silver chains, and a skull pendant. What surprises me the most, however, are the bull-like horns growing from his head.

“What is this?! I’ve never felt such power! Is this really my body...?!”

“Hmph. It appears your stats are now somewhat deserving of your title. All right, let’s head back to Unoporta’s place and start training.”

T-training?! After all that?!

We just completed our handstand torture. All I want to do is rest. But Cerceus, to my surprise, audaciously curls his lips.

“Sure thing. Let’s get this training started.”

We immediately return to Unoporta’s house after retiring from Xul Luxu’s residence. Despite it being night, the spacious garden is faintly illuminated by the glowstone lamps. Cerceus and Seiya each grab a wooden sword that Dueporta prepared for them.

“Don’t let your guard down, Seiya. Cerceus’s stats as a demon are ten times higher than they used to be.”

“When Hathies was speaking, when we were walking through the underworld, and when you two were playing with the upside-down woman, I was secretly training, so I’ve leveled up a few times as well.”

“O-oh... Wait! We weren’t playing with her, you know!”

Ignoring my shouting, Seiya gets into a battle stance with his wooden sword and faces the savage-looking Divine Blade.

“All right, Cerceus. Come at me with everything you’ve got.”

“...Okay.”

Cerceus mutters...before instantly vanishing out of sight! A dull sound reverberates, and in the very next moment, Cerceus is standing with his wooden sword fully swung while Seiya is clutching his stomach and crouching.

“C-Cerceus?! Seiya’s still at a very low level! Don’t you think you sh—”

“He told me not to hold back, so I didn’t.”

At any rate, I still can’t believe Cerceus hit him! Seiya stands back up, still clutching his stomach.

“Nice, Cerceus. Continue.”

“Heh. I don’t mind fighting barehanded if you’d prefer.”

...It turns into a one-sided beatdown after that. Cerceus effortlessly dodges Seiya’s wooden sword while landing vicious blows on his body. Seiya’s body is bent at the waist, opening him up for a barrage of punches, which knock him from side to side.

N-no...! What is going on?! Seiya is getting his ass handed to him by Cerceus! I decide to intervene, unable to watch any longer.

“That’s enough, Cerceus!”

“What’s wrong, Rista? I’m just helping him train.”

“No, this is you getting revenge for everything he’s done to you!”

“...Rista, move.”

But Seiya staggers back to his feet. He spits blood onto the garden with his bruised, swollen lips.

“Keep going, Cerceus.”

“Oh? I admire your courage.”

But that’s when I notice a dark red aura enveloping Seiya’s body.

“Berserk...”

Oh! He’s going to double his stats! He should be able to handle Cerceus in Demon Mode now! Berserker Seiya raises his sword into a high guard, then swings! ...And Cerceus effortlessly stops the wooden blade with his index finger.

“Hm? Was that supposed to hurt?”

Cerceus smirks while raising his fist into the air.

“Feel the tremendous power of a demon god!”

He then lands a punch square in the middle of Seiya’s face. A dull blow echoes before Seiya is sent flying back a few meters.

Th-this is the complete opposite of what usually happens when they spar! I get that Seiya’s at an extremely low level right now, but...I had no idea Cerceus’s Demon Mode would be so powerful!

Cerceus shakes the blood off his fist, then says:

“I’m getting sleepy, so you’re free to go play now. We’ll pick up where we left off tomorrow.”

After Cerceus leisurely returns to the house, Seiya collapses in the garden like he’s making a snow angel.

“What is wrong with him, suddenly getting cocky the moment he got stronger! What a loser!”

I rest Seiya’s head in my lap while healing him with my magic. His wounds are terrible. It looks like he was brutally beaten by a powerful monster, and it’s taking a while for my magic to heal him, since I can’t use Order.

“I’m sorry about all of this.”

It’s weird seeing Seiya hurt so badly. I feel terrible. After a moment of silence, Seiya quietly mutters: “The training is going smoothly. Besides, when has it ever not been difficult?”

“B-but this time it isn’t really about saving a parallel world. I dragged you into the spirit world’s mess...”

“I’ve got a stake in this, too.”

“...?!”

“I don’t know why Mersais was banished from the spirit world, and there objectively seems to be a problem with the innermost plane’s methods as well. Regardless...”

Although riddled with wounds and bruises, Seiya’s eyes are sharp.

“I have unfinished business from last time. I’m gonna defeat Mersais.”

“S-Seiya...!”

Seiya then slowly stands back up and begins to drag his feet forward. I tightly grip Kiriko’s pendant while watching him walk away.

The next morning, I’m sleeping in my room when, all of a sudden, I hear wooden swords clashing in the distance. Startled, I sit up and immediately head to the garden, where I unsurprisingly find Cerceus and Seiya sparring... No, actually, I feel like I’m witnessing a murder.

“Take this! Demon Slash!”

Cerceus’s wooden sword vanishes in a blur before reappearing as it buries itself into Seiya’s shoulder. Seiya’s bones creak, and he immediately collapses to the ground.

“That’s enough! Stop it!”

I hold out my arms in front of Seiya, but he pushes me out of the way.

“...Continue.”

“As you wish! Feel the tremendous power of a demon god to your heart’s content!”

Seiya, already a berserker, tries to dodge Cerceus's next strike, but neither his eyes nor his body seem to be able to keep up. Cerceus is simply too powerful. While Seiya continues to rise after being knocked down, he suddenly takes a savage thrust to the solar plexus. His face twists as he collapses, unable to move. I rush over to his side.

"Seiya! There's no reason for you to do this to yourself! Just take things slowly and get stronger like you always do!"

"Everything that's happened until now can't even compare to saving three warped worlds and defeating Mersais along with her Hero. I probably won't be able to do it if I keep doing things the way I always have."

"But...!"

Cerceus watches Seiya stagger to his feet and sighs.

"This is getting annoying. I'm just gonna knock him out and call it a day."

A black aura overflows from Cerceus's body. He draws his sword back before lunging right for Seiya!

"Mwah-ha-ha-ha! Demon Slash: Full Power!!"

Seiya...!!

I instinctively close my eyes, then slowly open them...and gasp! Seiya caught Cerceus's wooden sword with one hand!

"H-huh...?"

Cerceus squeaks.

"Level fifty-eight. Good job, Cerceus. I was able to level up at an extremely quick pace thanks to you."

The Divine Blade's pupils contract as he slowly retreats. Seiya continues: "I think it's time I raise my berserker phase before we continue sparring."

"What the...?! I thought you already raised it as high as you could?!"

"I've been maintaining Phase 1.1 up until now. This is what the real deal looks like."

Immediately, Seiya's hair turns red, and sharp fangs peek out from under his

lips.

“Berserk: Phase Two.”

An aura even greater than Cerceus’s is expelled from Seiya’s entire body.

“Berserk: Phase 2.8...”

Seiya’s raising his berserker phase as high as he can, and his extraordinary drive causes my body to tingle.

“Here I come, Cerceus.”

“Huh?! Wait. I—”

A ray of crimson light shoots straight through Cerceus. *Snap!* A dry sound reverberates. I have no idea what just happened until...

“Ouuuuuuch!”

The demon pathetically screams. When I look closely, I notice that Cerceus is missing a horn. Seiya picks up the horn and observes it.

“Oh, hey, what’s this? Must be garbage.”

“That isn’t garbage! That’s my horn! Give it back!”

“Hmph.”

Seiya snorts, then tosses the horn into the bushes. He tightly clenches the fist that isn’t holding his wooden sword and cracks his knuckles.

“I was planning on staying in the underworld for a while, but it looks like I’m going to be done with training quicker than I thought.”

“O-oh. That’s...wonderful...”

Cerceus breaks down mentally along with his horn, and he assumes his usual, pathetic fake smile.

“Well, I’m glad I could help! Anyway, I think I’m going to go take a nap!”

“Is that some sort of joke only demons would get?”

“Uh... It wasn’t a joke?”

“It’s still early. From now on, you’re going to be helping me train until I reach

max level. Sleeping and eating are both wastes of time, so we'll keep those to a minimum."

"B-but...!"

"Now, come. Show me the tremendous power of a 'demon god.'"

"Oh, um... Now that I think about it, it's not *that* tremendous. In fact, it's rather small..."

And so their relationship returns to normal. To be honest...I don't feel sorry for him at all! Enjoy your humble pie, Cerceus!

Anyway, Seiya purposely kept his berserker level low and had Cerceus beat him almost unconscious multiple times to enhance the effectiveness of the training. In a way, I feel like I can see how determined he is after witnessing him train differently than he ever has before.

And everything he does, he does in order to save the warped worlds and defeat Mersais!

However...

"Ow, ow, ow, ow! Please...! No more...! No moooooooooore!"

While watching Seiya, who is showing no emotion while relentlessly beating the screaming Divine Blade over the head with a wooden sword, I start to think he's much more of a demon than Cerceus ever was.

Remote Victory

“How are things with Seiya?”

“He’s been training with Cerceus every day since then.”

Five days have passed. I chat with Uno as we cook in the Porta residence kitchen. While cleanly chopping some vegetables, I sigh.

“*Sigh...* I can transform into a demon, too, but he still hasn’t asked me to help.”

“Maybe he simply does not wish for you to get hurt?”

“Hm... I don’t know about that. It doesn’t feel like it’s because he’s looking out for me.”

Regardless, I have quite a bit of free time, so I’ve been working on my cooking. Despite there being so many ingredients unknown to me, I haven’t had a problem, thanks to my special ability Appraise. The food Uno and Due have been serving us isn’t bad, but I want to make Seiya cuisine similar to what he used to eat in Japan, so I’ve been searching for appropriate ingredients.

“I think I’ll make curry today. Now where were those spices...?”

“They should be on the shelf over there.”

“Thanks!”

I walk over to the shelf Uno pointed at when...

“What the—?!”

I shriek...because I find Cerceus curled in a ball right next to the shelf.

“Wh-wh-what are you doing?!”

Cerceus is in Demon Mode, but he’s covered in bruises, and both of his horns are gone.

“What does it look like I’m doing?! I’m hiding!”

I glare at Cerceus in disgust.

“You’re an idiot, you know that? Did you honestly not know this was going to happen?”

“I think turning into a demon created a darkness in my heart! So I got a little too cocky!”

“Oh, my. That is strange. It shouldn’t affect you mentally as long as you’re in the underworld.”

“See? You heard Uno. You’re the only one to blame!”

“Groan...”

But Cerceus clutches his head while trembling.

“I’m scared... He’s so scary... He breaks my horns every time I turn into a demon! Without fail...!”

“R-really?”

“Rista, Cerceus appears to be utterly exhausted. We should leave him be.”

I leave the trembling deity behind and return to cooking, but it isn’t long before Seiya walks into the kitchen.

“Rista, have you seen Cerceus?”

I hesitate for a second, but I end up quietly pointing to the corner by the shelf. Seiya immediately marches over and grabs Cerceus by the scruff of the neck like a cat before he begins dragging him away.

“A-ahhhhhh! No, no, no, nooooooooooo! I don’t wanna goooooo! Somebody, heeeeeelp!”

Watching Cerceus throw a tantrum kind of breaks my heart. It’s like helplessly watching a child being kidnapped. B-but, well, you reap what you sow! Good luck, Cerceus! You just have to bear with it a little longer until Seiya reaches max level!

That afternoon, I bring the curry I made to the garden, where they’re training, only to find Cerceus facedown and unconscious. After saying a prayer over his

body, I invite Seiya to the garden table and grace him with curry.

“So how’s the leveling up coming along?”

“I actually just reached max level a few minutes ago.”

“Already?! I guess that means you’re ready to go!”

“Not yet. There’s still one more thing I have to do.”

Seiya begins to walk off after eating, so I follow him.

“Hey, where are you going?”

“To town.”

The people of the underworld lick their lips and grin when they see Cerceus and me. I find it really unsettling, so I’ve made it a point not to stray too far from Uno’s place. Seiya, however, has apparently been going to town after training or whenever he has a little free time, so I decide to muster up all my courage and follow after him.

...The underworld is crawling with bizarre creatures today as well. From individuals with long, serpentine necks to living, disembodied heads rolling on the ground, there are countless new sights to be seen around the Lord of the Underworld’s shrine.

“Hello, Seiya!”

“Good afternoon!”

“How have you been?”

I don’t know what’s going on, but everyone’s warmly greeting Seiya.

What in the world...?! Since when is he Mr. Popular?!

A creature, with the face of a woman but the body of a centipede, sweetly smiles at Seiya. I decide to copy Seiya, act natural, and greet her.

“Good afternoon!”

Her body immediately twists, and she begins licking her lips.

“Hyah-hee-hee-hee-hooo! A goddess...! A goddesssssssss! Give me your HP!”

“Why did she suddenly change her tune when I greeted her?!”

I promptly hide behind Seiya. Uno said that the people of the underworld respect deities, but...I’m starting to feel like they only see us as HP dispensers!

But to no one’s surprise, Seiya briskly walks ahead with an air of apathy before stopping at a certain shop. Inside the wooden building, past the curtains, are what appear to be numerous swords, shields, and armor on display.

“Whoa?! There’s a weapon shop in the underworld?!”

A creature of the underworld crawls out from the back with its wiggling tentacles. The individual, who looks similar to an octopus in Seiya’s world, must be the shop’s owner.

“Did my order arrive?”

“Got it right here. But it wasn’t easy getting a spare for your spare and all that nonsense.”

It sounds like they’ve met before. The octopus-like owner uses his multiple tentacles to pick up and show off a slightly dull scarlet suit of armor and a sword with a blade of the same color.

“Seiya, did you order weapons from here?”

“Yes. I actually wanted to order more, but he said it wasn’t feasible, so I made sure to keep the order small.”

“What part of this order looks ‘small’?! You’ve got more weapons now than any rational person needs!”

The owner looks just as shocked as me. Not even a second goes by before I realize something else and yell: “Hold on! Are you even going to be able to bring weapons from the underworld to parallel worlds?!”

“These items now belong to the customer. I don’t care what he does with them, nor where he does it.”

S-seriously?! Because this would never fly in the spirit world! The rules here are so lax! But there probably aren’t any good weapons or armor in warped Gaeabrande, so finding equipment here might be Seiya’s best bet.

I can't believe Seiya was even making arrangements for weapons during training!

I secretly admire him until the shop owner's mild manner suddenly changes along with his expression.

"Now it's time to *pay* for those weapons."

W-wait! Don't tell me I have to be humiliated again?! After I step back in fear, Seiya says: "Don't worry. I brought something of equivalent value with me."

"Huh?"

Seiya pulls one of the heavy, pointy objects out of his pouch.

"This is your payment. 'The shameful horn of the God of Swords.'"

"Wh-wh-what magnificent HP!"

What the...?! He can use this as currency?! And just how many of Cerceus's horns did he break?! Seiya ends up trading twenty of Cerceus's horns for a total of ten swords and ten suits of armor. He then wastes no time before changing into his equipment in the back. When he returns, I use Appraise on his dull vermillion equipment.

Sword and armor from the underworld. The equipment is made from the ancient metal scarletium, giving it a higher durability than both diamonds and platinum. This equipment is super rare and can only be found in the underworld!

"Wow! That equipment is amazing!"

"It's superior to platinum swords and mail as well."

"That's wonderful, Seiya!"

After that, Seiya purchases a shield as well "just in case," despite the fact that he's not going to use it, since he's a magic knight. On our way out, the owner says: "Pleasure doing business with you."

Once outside, Seiya immediately enters the shop right next door. Inside are countless oddities, but there are also run-of-the-mill medicinal herbs as well. It looks like this is the underworld's item shop.

“I’ll take this, that, that, and all of those over there.”

The shopkeeper this time is a headless suit of armor, but Seiya doesn’t seem concerned as he extravagantly buys almost everything in sight, as per usual.

“I appreciate ya wanting to buy this much, but can ya really pay for it all?”

Seiya responds to the dubious owner by showing him a bagful of Cerceus’s horns.

“‘The shameful horns of the God of Swords.’

“Oooh! Sold! Take as much as ya want!”

That’s enough to buy everything in the shop?! Just how versatile are Cerceus’s horns?! After purchasing a ton of underworld items—most of which I have no idea how he’s going to use—we begin leaving the shop, when suddenly the shopkeeper walks over to Seiya’s side and mutters:



“Ya know, it’d be really nice if ya could sweeten the pot a little more before ya go. I did sell ya *everything*, after all.”

“Fine.”

Immediately, Seiya grabs a handful of my hair and rips it out.

“Owww!”

He then chucks it at the shopkeeper.

“Here.”

“Ooo! Thank ya very much, kind sir!”

“Did you just use *my* hair as a tip?!”

I scream at Seiya, but he nonchalantly retires from the shop then begins walking away.

“Wh-where are you going now?!”

“To Xul Luxu’s place.”

“What?! But we already got what we wanted from her, right?”

“There’s something I want to discuss with her. Her special move was pretty interesting.”

“D-don’t tell me... Do you plan on turning into a demon, too?!”

“I wouldn’t be able to even if I wanted to. I did have an idea, though, while I was watching both of you be humiliated.”

Wh-what kind of idea could that have given him...? I’m curious, but just hearing the name “Xul Luxu” gives me anxiety. I don’t want to be forced into another handstand. Plus, Seiya is giving off his “How long do you plan on following me?” aura, so I decide to head back to Uno’s place alone.

Another three days go by.

“Cercean, could you water the flowers over there next?”

“Sure thing.”

Cercean was dismissed from his role the moment Seiya reached max level, so

he started helping Due around the garden. He looks like a new man. He's as happy as can be ever since he was freed from his training. Hm... Although there isn't a single godlike thing about him anymore, he seems to enjoy cooking and doing chores. But all of a sudden, his once mirthful expression soon twists in fear. When I follow his gaze, I notice Seiya walking on his hands and coming this way!

"S-Seiya?! What are you doing?!"

"What does it look like? I'm walking on my hands."

"I can see that! I want to know *why* you're walking on your hands!"

But Seiya just focuses on a single point in his handstand and ignores my question. W-wait...! Don't tell me he's...!

Seiya calmly states:

"I'm perfectly prepared."

...?! That might have been cool if he weren't doing a handstand! B-but he's finally ready to go!

"Yes!! Let's go save warped Gaeabrande!"

I shout. Cerceus, however, awkwardly scratches his head.

"Oh, uh... About that... Should I stay here? I-I'm sure I'd just get in the way if I went with you anyway."

Both Seiya and I look at Cerceus in disgust, but he makes a fine point. He'd be pretty useless. I wouldn't mind if he stayed behind, but...

"You cannot stay here, Cerceus."

Uno, who had been listening to our conversation, suddenly spoke up with a smile.

"Wh-why?!"

"Because our Lord requested that you go along with them as well. He told me that it would benefit you in the long run."

"No... Seriously? Can things get any worse than this? I'd rather die than go back there!"

Cerceus is on the verge of tears. I have no idea what Hathies is thinking, but it looks like Cerceus is coming with us whether we like it or not. Seiya deeply sighs. Yeah, I know how you feel! I really do!

“You better not hold us back, Cerceus!”

After scolding him, I turn around and smile at Seiya.

“Right, Seiya?”

“Dammit. As if one pain in the ass wasn’t enough...”

“Yeah, I know what y—hey! That was a little harsh, don’t you think?!”

“Rista, can you open a gate to a specified location?”

“N-no, I can only open a gate that leads to the same place we went last time. I won’t be able to open a gate to any unknown locations anymore, either, since I can’t get permission from Ishtar...”

“You’re even more useless to me now.”

“Hey! This isn’t my fault!”

“Just open the gate.”

Seiya is trying to rush me, but Edona Village is overrun with bloodthirsty dragonewts. We’ve been in the underworld for a while, but since time flows more slowly here, surely not much time has passed in Gaeabrande. It’s highly possible that the dragonewts are still looking for us. Slightly nervous, I double-check with Seiya.

“Are you sure about this, Seiya? I’m going to open the gate.”

“Do it.”

Immediately after chanting and opening a gate to warped Gaeabrande, Seiya briskly walks ahead of me. This is the beginning of a new adventure. Uno and Due smile as they bow and see us off.

“Have a safe journey, everyone.”

“Come back whenever you want. We’ll leave the guest rooms just the way you left them.”

“Uno! Due! Thank you so much!”

I wave good-bye. But while I was planning on leaving with a smile, I notice Seiya is still standing right in front of the gate.

“Um... Seiya? Are you not going to go through?”

Before long, he gently opens the door and sticks one hand through the gate.

“Automatic Phoenix.”

A fiery bird shoots out of his hand, flapping its wings as it goes to scout. The Hero’s magic and skills change depending on the parallel world. Last time in Ixphoria, Seiya mainly focused on earth magic, so he usually used golems to scout, but he can’t use earth magic in Gaeabrande. That’s probably why he used an Automatic Phoenix instead.

Seiya vulnerably closes his eyes in front of the gate, leaving the door wide open.

“Hm... There are approximately one hundred dragonewts. There don’t seem to be any humans in the town.”

It sounds like he’s linking his eyes with the phoenix’s to get a bird’s-eye view of the area. This is exactly the amount of caution I expect from him. There is one thing that’s bothering me, though. Why did he leave the door to the gate wide open?

Wouldn’t he be better off going through the gate even if it’s just to scout the area?

Due and Uno watch over us until my one fear becomes reality. A dragonewt on the other side points in our direction!

“Huh?! I found a gate!”

“It must be them! The heretics are inside the gate!”

Dragonewts rapidly gather on the other side of the gate. Cerceus screams: “Ahhh! They found us!!”

“S-Seiya! This isn’t good! The dragonewts are coming!”

W-we need to close the gate and—but I gasp before I can even finish my train

of thought...because Seiya holds his hand up to the gate!

“Stop panicking. I already have a clear shot.”

“A-a clear *what*?!”

A flood of dragonewts, all bearing weapons with Chain Destruction, rush the gate! Cerceus and I wilt before their bloodthirsty eyes, but Seiya remains calm and tightly clenches his fist aimed toward the gate.

“Meteor Strike.”

Right as Seiya is finishing chanting, he swings his body to the side, kicking the door to warped Gaeabrande shut! A brief silence passes, followed by a blast so powerful that the gate creaks and twists from the other side.

“Whoa!”

The quakes from the violent explosion knock me and Cerceus to the ground. After a few moments, Seiya finally places a hand on the warped door and slowly opens it. All we can see on the other side of the gate is a town reduced to ashes. Not a trace of the abandoned village remains. Smoke slowly rises out of a massive crater that looks like it was made by a comet. The buildings have been destroyed, and countless charred remains of dragonewts lie piled on top of one another.

“Clear.”

I watch Seiya mutter that to himself as my lips quiver.

Wh-wh-who the hell attacks like this?! He just cleared out an entire horde of dragonewts in Edona without even leaving the underworld!

“I-it looks like we’re safe now! I’m sure glad Seiya’s on our side!”

Cerceus’s face is overcome with relief. And...

“Hee-hee-hee! I would never have even thought of doing such a thing!”

Unoporta coughs up a little blood in her excitement. Seiya lightly cracks his neck.

“All right, then. Let’s go. It’s time we save warped Gaeabrande.”

Seiya then marches forward and gallantly disappears into the gate.

“S-Seiya?!”

“W-wait!”

“B-bye, Uno! We’re really leaving this time!”

Cerceus and I follow after Seiya in a fluster, but on my way through the gate...

“Heh-heh-heh. That’s Seiya for you.”

“Yes. After all, he is our...”

Huh?

Due and Uno’s conversation catches me off guard, so I try to turn around and listen, but the door quietly closes behind me.

The Perfection of Conversion

We walk through the scorched plains of a village once known as Edona before a meteor reduced it to ash. Smoke continues to rise as a nearby building, which barely avoided the meteor's direct impact, slowly burns to the ground.

"Whew... What a mess."

"Ahhh! What is this?! This isn't something a human should be capable of!"

I know exactly how Cerceus feels. It is shocking, and it reminds me of when Seiya used Meteor Strike from the sky and destroyed an entire army of ten thousand undead soldiers.

He made excellent use of earth magic while in Ixphoria as well, but he seems to have an easier time exercising the talents he was gifted with in Gaeabrande. Feeling so much more confident now, I look back at Seiya and notice he's holding his hands toward the sky for some reason.

"Meteor Strike."

""...What?""

Cerceus and I are incredulous, and we timidly look up at the sky, only to realize that there are even more colossal meteors falling to the surface.

""Ahhhhhhhhh?!""

Right as Cerceus and I lower our heads and squat, my eardrums nearly rupture because of the powerful roar, and the ground is shaking so much that I can't stand up! Without anything to grab for support, I reluctantly latch onto Cerceus and he does the same to me... When I look up at Seiya a few moments later, he seems serene, as if he were having tea at a café.

"I scorched the surrounding suburbs just in case. Safety first."

"What part of that was safe?! What if there were still people living there?!"

“I already deployed Automatic Phoenixes to make sure there weren’t any people within a one-kilometer radius inside and outside of town.”

Well, if Seiya says there wasn’t anyone else here, then that’s that. Even if innocents did get caught in the blast, this is a warped world. Once we fix the distortion, everything will go back to normal, apparently. I still can’t help but think that second Meteor Strike was overkill, though. Cerceus, seemingly feeling the same way, whispers to me:

“H-hey, is he always like this?”

“Yep. For him, there’s no such thing as ‘too careful.’”

“I know I said I was glad he’s on our side, but...I’m starting to get worried.”

Cerceus tightly grabs me by the arm.

“Rista...!”

“What the...?! Could you not touch my divine skin with your filthy hands?!”

“Look...! Over there...!”

When I look in the direction he’s pointing, I can’t believe my eyes. A dragonewt is slowly walking this way even though his entire body is engulfed in flames.

“A dragonewt?! A-and he’s on fire?! Meteor Strike really did a number on him, though!”

“Y-yeah, he’s really beat up! We should be okay, right?!”

“This is Seiya we’re talking about. I’m sure he left one alive on purpose so he could interrogate him.”

“Oh, that makes sense!”

Cerceus seems to be relieved when I tell him that, but Seiya stands in front of me and unsheathes his sword. His hair and eyes are red. It looks like he turned into a berserker while we were talking.

“Huh?! Seiya...?”

“During the very beginning of a journey, safety should always be prioritized over gathering information. That’s why I dropped one meteor in the center of

the city and four in the suburbs. I used Meteor Strike with the intent of eradicating every last enemy, and yet, that one survived.”

“What...?!”

When I look hard at the dragonewt, I notice that while he may be on fire, his gait is steady and firm. It’s as if he doesn’t even care that crimson flames are lapping at his skin as he marches straight for us. Seiya grinds his teeth.

“I can’t believe it.”

Y-yeah! What’s going on?! I can’t believe there’s a dragonewt that can survive that many Meteor Strikes!

But Seiya doesn’t seem to be thinking the same thing as me.

“I used far too few Meteor Strikes. I should have gone with at least a hundred...”

“...?! Forget the town! You would have destroyed the entire planet with that many! Don’t even think about it!”

But as we chat, the dragonewt approaches until he’s only a few meters away from us. Seiya flicks his wrist a few times in a “back up” gesture, so Cerceus and I stand far behind him to make sure we don’t get in the way. The dragonewt opens his mouth to speak, exposing his small fangs.

“My comrades informed me of the man and woman who assumed the titles of Hero and Goddess. They said you were impostors, but...your tremendous power is proof that you are the real thing.”

He speaks in a very eloquent manner, but his complete lack of emotion makes it seem like we’re being addressed by a machine. That’s when I notice that the fire covering his scales is growing in intensity!

Th-that isn’t fire from Meteor Strike, is it? Is he...?

My intuition was right. The burning flames become wings on the dragonewt’s back. As he flaps them, he slowly rises off the ground.

“And since you are the real thing, I fear I must kill you, for these are the teachings of the Seraph.”

“Wh-what the hell are the teachings of the Seraph?!”

“They are profound and peaceful teachings, founded by Lord Dragonight, used to worship the Seraph who descended to Gaeabrande.”

The dragonewt then mimes a cross over his chest.

“May the Seraph bless us all.”

Cerceus shouts with a trembling voice:

“I-is it just me or does he look really powerful?! I thought the first monsters you face in parallel worlds were supposed to be slimes and goblins!”

He’s right. Things like this would never happen in any ordinary parallel world, but this is nothing surprising to Seiya and me.

“Don’t worry! Seiya predicted something like this might happen, which is why he trained so long in the underworld!”

It’s as if I’m trying to convince myself of the truth in those words as I shout, and I immediately use Scan to check the dragonewt’s stats.

Blazing Dragon Hydral

Lv: 85

HP: 245051 MP: 15234

ATK: 152444 DEF: 443512 SPD: 126549

Resistance: Fire, Wind, Water, Lightning, Earth, Holy, Dark, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Curse, Instant Death, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Null Physical (LV: MAX), Absorb Fire Magic (LV: MAX), Null Wind Magic (LV: MAX), Null Water Magic (LV: MAX), Null Earth Magic (LV: MAX), Null Lightning Magic (LV: MAX), Null Holy Magic (LV: MAX), Null Dark Magic (LV: MAX)

Skills: Dark Catastrophe, Desperate Sphere

Personality: Martyr

His skills are nothing to write home about compared to Seiya in his berserker form, but those special abilities! Not only can he absorb fire magic, but he is

immune to almost every other type of magic as well! Plus, weapons aren't going to work on him, and he has extremely high defense! Ice magic is probably the only thing that'll be effective... Wait. I feel as if I've seen stats like these somewhere before...

Seiya must have seen the enemy's status screen as well and mutters:

"His stats are similar to that fire monster's that I fought in the un-warped Gaeabrande."

Fire monster...? O-oh yeah! They're similar to the monster Dark Firus that Deathmagla created! It was basically immune to everything but ice magic, too! If I remember correctly, I think Seiya used Oscillatory Wave and an ice bangle to break through its defense...

Before I even realize it, Hydral is holding a thick book. It's the same "scripture" that the other dragonewt had.

"Seiya, watch out! A sword with Chain Destruction is going to come out of that book!"

Hydral thereupon bears his fangs with a snicker.

"This is no sword but a custom weapon made specially for me."

He suddenly opens his massive mouth and swallows the scripture whole! Immediately, the fire consuming his body turns jet-black along with the flaming wings on his back. Hydral then spits out black fire in a taunting gesture!

"These are no longer ordinary flames but hellfire that can even burn your souls away."

Fire infused with Chain Destruction?! If that hits us, we're toast! Literally! I brace myself for a dark-flame attack, but Hydral suddenly vanishes! And by the time I realize it, he's already rapidly approaching Seiya.

"S-Seiya!"

"Heh-heh-heh...! Dark Catastrophe!"

The dark flames emanating from his body curl like snakes as they streak toward Seiya. However...

“Maximum Inferno.”

While I was taken by surprise, the berserker Hero had already reacted. Numerous streams of fire shoot out of Seiya’s hands before clashing with the black flames. I’m relieved that he was able to block Chain Destruction, but the black flames unbelievably start overpowering Seiya’s, pushing them back!

“Why?! How can Seiya’s Maximum Inferno be losing?!”

Seiya’s stats are way higher, though! Hydral sticks out his long, forked tongue.

“None can withstand the black all-consuming flames of Dark Catastrophe, granted to me by the Seraph.”

“O-oh, right! He can absorb fire magic! He must be absorbing Seiya’s!”

Not only can he nullify magic and physical attacks, but he can also absorb Seiya’s specialty—fire magic! Th-this is not good! He’s probably the worst possible matchup for Seiya! I am slowly crushed with anxiety as I watch the enemy absorb Seiya’s flames in the air. The Hero’s expression, however, remains unchanged.



“Hmph,” he grunts. “If fire magic won’t work, then I’ll just use the opposite element.”

“The opposite element...? Seiya?! You brought an ice bangle with you again, didn’t you?”

Since Seiya is a fire-type Hero, he cannot use ice magic, which is why he brought an ice-magic-infused item with him to the Dark Firus battle, but...

“Elemental bangles lack magic power, making them nothing more than a makeshift solution. They won’t be of any use to me anymore, though, because after training with Xul Luxu, I’m now able to learn skills which I once couldn’t.”

“D-do you mean...?”

“I can change my elemental affinity from fire to ice now.”

“What?! You can do that?!”

There’s no way a fire-type Hero can use ice magic, since it’s the opposite element! I-is he saying he used Xul Luxu’s Conversion move to make that possible?!

“Just like Unoporta said, there aren’t many people in the underworld who possess moves suited for battle, but in some cases, training with them can be even more advantageous than training with the gods of the spirit world.”

Seiya then snaps his fingers.

“Conversion.”

Immediately, a snowy aura overflows from Seiya’s body. Cold air brushes against my skin as I stand by his side.

Th-ther- there’s no doubt about it! He really changed his element... Wait.

“Hold on! Don’t you have to do a handstand and say your name backward to change your element like we did?!”

“You don’t need to act like a clown if you use Perfect-Element Conversion.”

“Who are you calling a clown?!”

Ugh! Why did Cerceus and I have to dance like circus monkeys while Seiya

gets to act like a star when he does the move?! It's not fair! But that's when I realize something even more important.

"S-Seiya...! Uno said our powers would run out of control if either Cerceus or I turned into a demon in a parallel world! Are you okay changing elements like that?!"

"No. I'll lose control of my magic power as well."

"Isn't that bad?!" I shout.

Nevertheless, Seiya continues to extend his arm toward Hydral. Glacial air coalesces in the palm of his hand, materializing into a giant icicle until he swings his arm and launches it at lightning speed.

"Ha-ha-ha! Where were you even aiming?"

Hydral asks with a cackle as the icicle passes right through the empty space a few meters away from him.

"This is what it means to lose control of your magic. While it multiplies your magic attack power, it makes it difficult to aim."

"What?! So you can't hit him?!"

Seiya throws another icicle while we're talking, but it doesn't even scratch Hydral! In fact, it goes in the complete opposite direction!

"Heh-heh-heh. It does not matter how powerful your attacks are if you cannot hit me."

Hydral begins to gather pure energy in his hands while still floating, as if he decided that Seiya's attacks were no threat, and before long, it swells into a massive sphere of black flames.

"Now, it is time to offer your lives to the Seraph!"

A-ack...! He plans on killing us with that!

It's like I'm staring into a black sun! I don't need to guess what'll happen if that thing hits us! I'm not sure we'd be okay even if we managed to dodge a direct hit!

I instinctively retreat a half step, but Seiya still has his right arm aimed at the

dragonewt in the sky. Frigid air once again begins to gather before his hand.

W-we're done for! The icicle could probably cancel out the enemy's attack if it connected. But judging by what I've seen so far...that's definitely not going to happen! He's going to miss!

Nevertheless, Seiya is showing no signs of attacking just yet. He continues to gather pure energy in his right hand just like Hydral.

It looks like he's putting everything he has into this next icicle! Oh...! He must be waiting until the black sphere gets close enough before firing! That would definitely raise his chances of being able to cancel out the enemy's attack!

I feel like Seiya's just rolling the dice, trying to hit such a powerful attack with his low-accuracy icicles. Breathing heavily, I turn my gaze to Seiya...and immediately realize my assumption was wrong. The icicle forming before Seiya's right hand is different from the colossal one he made a few moments ago. It's a small icicle about the size of his index finger.

Countless tiny icicles form in the blink of an eye. Hydral is watching Seiya from the sky, but he seems to have the utmost confidence in his own attack. Not showing the least bit of concern, he gloats:

"Your little tricks mean nothing before this attack! Now, burn! Return to the ash from whence you came! Desperate Sphere!"

"H-here it comes!!"

Cerceus shrieks. Hydral is confident! His attack seems like it'll be just as powerful as Meteor Strike! Terrified, I instinctively look away, but I suddenly hear the sound of something moving fast against the wind coming from Seiya's direction.

Wh-what the...?!

When I look up at the sky, I notice that Hydral has been thrown off balance with the black sphere of fire still swelling over his hands.

"Ngh...! You vile heretic...!"

Wh-what just happened?! Did Seiya's attack connect?!

When I glance over at Seiya, he's still in the same pose as before with his right

hand aimed at Hydral, but I notice there's something different. There are far fewer icicles floating in front of his hand. Hydral tries to regain his footing while he groans, but I make sure to focus on Seiya this time to see what happens.

Seiya swings his right arm, shooting over a hundred icicles forward as they spread out in the shape of a paper fan. They shoot toward Hydral at blinding speed. While half of them miss and sail right by the enemy, the rest hit him in the head, stomach, arms, and legs!

“Gwah...!”

Hydral groans in agony once more. When I look closely, I notice that the spots where he was hit are turning pale. It looks like the damage caused him to lose focus because the sphere of black flames shrinks until it vanishes completely.

“Y-you will pay for this...!”

Hydral's face twists in rage as he glares at Seiya from the sky, but Seiya directs a piercing glare right back at him.

“You simply need to increase your range of fire if aiming proves difficult.”

“Seiya...! What was that attack?!”

With his right hand still aimed at Hydral, Seiya quietly mutters:

“An icicle spread shot: Fenrir Shot.”

Coexistence

“Firing next wave.”

A portion of the few hundred crystals floating in front of Seiya’s hand fly toward Hydral. The dragonewt swiftly moves out of the way with his fiery wings, but he isn’t able to dodge every last icicle because of the Fenrir Shot’s spread. Hydral lets out a pained groan.

It’s like he’s using a shotgun! He doesn’t really need to worry about aiming as much like this!

“I was careless with Meteor Strike, so I’m going to unload every last bullet I have this time.”

I wouldn’t call that “careless,” but Seiya seems to be regretting his actions. which is probably why he is creating countless small ice crystals before his right hand. Despite having already fired off three waves of icicles, it still looks like there’s more to come. However...

“Merely pelting me with pebbles will not be enough to kill me!”

Hydral fiercely descends toward us while bathing in the ice crystals.

N-no way...! Fenrir Shot isn’t working?!”

“The damage is greatly hampered due to the spread.”

Seiya says this as if it were no big deal. Every Fenrir Shot staggers Hydral a bit, but he still manages to advance between each attack.

“The moment you run out of ice crystals, you’re dead!”

Hydral continues to shrug off the frozen onslaught. His progress may be slow, but at this rate, it won’t be long before he reaches us!

“S-Seiya...! He’s not going to stop!”

“D-don’t worry, Cerceus! Those hits are adding up, right?! Even if they’re not doing that much damage individually, surely after enough hits he’ll—ah?!”

When I look in Seiya’s direction, I realize just how grave the situation is. Every last ice crystal is gone!

“A-are you out of ammo?!”

I hear a proud cackle coming from above.

“Ha-ha-ha! It appears you’re out of pebbles!”

There’s nothing we can do to stop him from descending now! He’s flying straight for us!

“Here he comes...! We’re done for! I’m so scared!”

Just as Cerceus tries to flee, Seiya lowers his right arm, then aims his left hand at Hydral.

“Locked and loaded.”

Countless small ice crystals suddenly materialize before Seiya’s left hand!

“Fenrir Shot.”

But the moment Seiya says that, Hydral is already less than ten meters away. He’s going to reach us in mere seconds, and yet, Fenrir Shot manages to hit him before he can.

“Gwah!”

Hydral, having been hit at point-blank range, flies back before slamming against the ground. Watching his opponent roll around in the dirt, Seiya contently mutters: “Good. Around eighty percent of my projectiles made contact thanks to him getting closer.”

“Th-thank goodness! I was worried there for a second! I totally thought you were out of ammo!”

“I won’t run out of ammo. I was concentrating magic into my left hand while shooting with my right. It takes ten seconds to unload every bullet with my right hand, but it also takes only ten seconds to reload with my left. The moment I finish attacking with one hand, I am already fully loaded with the other.”

“You mean you can keep shooting those forever?!”

“Until I run out of MP, of course. Incidentally, I have around 60,000 MP, and one Fenrir Shot consumes 2 MP, which means I can use it around 30,000 times.”

That’s basically forever! I feel stupid for even worrying! There’s pretty much nothing the enemy can do now...!

Even while talking to me, Seiya continues to pelt Hydral with Fenrir Shot. Every time the dragonewt tries to get up, another ice crystal pierces his body, knocking him back down.

I-it’s working! Hydral’s out of options! All Seiya has to do is wait for the damage to build up!

“G-gl...ah...!”

Hydral grunts. After each ice crystal pierces his body and turns the spot pale, another one immediately joins it. Before long, his fiery skin begins to frost over as his body freezes.

“M-my body is freezing...? This cannot be...!”

“S-Seiya...! What’s going on?!”

“I was never trying to damage him with the bullets. An ice spell is activated once a certain number of ice crystals hit and freeze the target. That is the true nature of Fenrir Shot.”

Hydral uses his final ounce of strength to knock away the encroaching ice crystals. The black flames manage to evaporate the icicles, but he is instantly hit with a second wave, causing even his right arm to freeze.

“Heretic...!”

That word he grunts in agony ends up being his last. An ice crystal hits him in the chest, immediately causing the frost to spread through his entire body, and soon, the endless Fenrir Shot completely turns Hydral into an ice sculpture.

“Yes! You won!”

Seeing Hydral frozen solid gives me some much-needed relief, but Seiya doesn’t relent. He continues to blast the dragonewt’s body with Fenrir Shot,

thickening the ice around it.

“S-Seiya! That’s enough, don’t you think?!”

“We shouldn’t underestimate his fire magic. He might thaw himself out and attack, so I need to make sure he’s really frozen.”

“W-well, if you say so... I-I guess it is better to be safe than sorry, after all!”

But clouds of white frost and powder begin to rise, and the temperature rapidly lowers as well.

B-brrr...! Does he plan on freezing me, too?!

My breath is white, I have goose bumps dotting my skin, and my legs begin to shake until all that lies before me is a giant hunk of ice.

“...?! He looks like an iceberg! Don’t you think you’ve done enough already?!”

“He would have a difficult time escaping from this. Now, it’s time to get started. Not even ice magic can freeze an opponent forever, so I need to deliver the final blow.”

Seiya unsheathes his sword.

“Berserk: Phase 2.8...”

After inhaling deeply, Seiya unloads on the iceberg with the most powerful berserker form he can currently muster! The piercing sounds of ice cracking reverberate as the block of ice is gradually shattered into tiny fragments. Like a snow cone, powdered ice scatters over my feet as I watch Seiya fight against what appears to be an inanimate object.

...One minute passes. The iceberg—or should I say Hydral—has been reduced to a mountain of glittery powdered snow.

“Y-yes! It’s over!”

Surely, even Seiya should be satisfied now. Anyway...ugh. He went way overboard again! I get how he feels, though, since I’d rather not have this dragonewt resurrect, either!

I smirk when I suddenly realize that Cerceus hasn’t made a peep these past few minutes. Is he dumbstruck by how cautious Seiya is? Or did the S+ ranked

battle scare him into silence? I search for Cerceus...and gasp. For some reason, he's covered in a thick layer of ice just like Hydral was a few moments ago!

"Seiya?! You accidentally froze Cerceus while you were freezing the enemy!"

"Yeah, it looks like the attack's range was so broad that he got himself frozen as well. He sure loves wasting my time."

Seiya stomps his foot, and the ice covering Cerceus's body immediately cracks before crumbling to the ground and giving birth to a purple-lipped, shivering deity.

"S-s-so...cold...! I'm gonna...freeze to death...!"

"Relax. Deities can't die no matter how hot or cold it is."

"But...it still really hurts...!"

Ignoring Cerceus, Seiya faces the snowy surface Hydral once lay on.

"Although I turned him into a fine powder, I'm still a little concerned. I should burn it."

After using Conversion and changing back into a fire knight, Seiya uses Hellfire and begins scorching the area.

W-will this ever end?!

It looks like Seiya isn't going to send his enemy's remains to the planet's core this time. Instead, he plans to go with his burn-it-until-nothing-remains policy. His "usual policy..." I don't even know what to say. While I'm a little weirded out, someone else speaks up.

"Ah...! Warmth! It feels so good!"

Cerceus has his hands over Seiya's fire in an attempt to warm himself up. It's a very surreal sight...until Seiya suddenly stops his flames.

"Huh?! Seiya...! It's getting cold! Don't stop the fire yet!"

"Shut up. I heard something."

I strain my ears, which can hear far better than any human's, and notice the faint sound of footsteps. A man wearing a gray robe suddenly appears from the shadows of a ruined house. Seiya's face immediately tenses far more than it

ever did when he faced Hydral.

“A human...? That’s impossible. There weren’t any signs of any people within a kilometer radius.”

Seiya is unusually startled, but the hooded gentleman seems surprised as well.

“I can’t believe my eyes. A mere human was able to defeat the Blazing Dragon...”

It sounds like he was watching Seiya fight from the shadows. The man removes his hood in admiration. Seiya promptly unsheathes his sword and gets into stance for battle, but I feel like I’ve seen this person before.

“It appears the dragonewts were right. The Hero and Goddess have arrived.”

The man raises his arms into the air to show he is no threat.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Flashika, an imperial mage of the former nation of Roseguard.”

Roseguard... Wait! *That* Roseguard?! Oh yeah! That’s the man who was with Rosalie and the emperor!

“Um... You were a lightning mage, right?”

“Oh...! I am but a mere mage, yet you know of me! Are these the majestic superpowers of the Goddess?”

“No, uh... Ha-ha... Wait! Flashika, how’s Rosalie?! Is she okay?!”

“Yes! The princess is in fine health!”

Thank goodness! I really hope Mash and Elulu are okay, too...

“So you know of us? That makes things much easier. I would like for you to meet with the princess. Would that be possible?”

“Of course! Right, Seiya?”

We’d learn so much more about the warped world if we met with Rosalie, so I readily agree. Seiya, however, is still cautious.

“There is one thing you need to tell me first. Where did you come from? I

didn't even sense your presence."

"I used a magic circle to teleport here from our town of Iglu, where I, the princess, and the rest of the human race currently live."

Flashika begins drawing a magic circle in the dirt with his staff.

"This teleportation circle used to be a secret ritual known only by the dragonewts. In the past, they used this to travel between the human continent and the dragonewts' homeland located on the continent of Yulea."

I suddenly think back to the battle against the Great Mother of Dragons. Seiya, Mash, Elulu, and I used this magic circle to teleport from the cave to the dragon village in prewarped Gaeabrande. Flashika is telling the truth. Nevertheless, Seiya gets on his knees and searches for something on the ground like he lost a contact lens while Flashika is drawing the circle.

"Psst. Rista. What is Seiya doing?"

Cerceus whispers to me in a soft voice so Flashika can't hear.

"You know how insanely cautious he is. He's probably just trying to make sure Flashika's teleportation circle is actually safe. Last time we were here, he caught a lizard and sent it through the magic circle first just in case."

"H-he did? Oh! He must be looking for a lizard, then!"

But after a few moments go by, Seiya shakes his head.

"Dammit. There aren't any good creatures around here... Cerceus, you go first."

"What the...?! Am I worth no more than a lizard to you?!"

Cerceus protests, but Seiya gives him a chilling gaze and says: "Remember, Cerceus. Gods don't...?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Gods don't...?"

"G-gods... Um... Gods don't...d-die..."

"Exactly. Now, go."

“...Okay.”

Oh my gosh! He made Cerceus say it! How pathetic! But if it weren't for him, I'd probably be the one treated like garbage. So with that in mind, I can't help but inwardly feel grateful to him.

After Cerceus and Flashika go through the teleportation circle, then return together once more, making a round trip, which I find hard to believe was necessary...

“All right, let's go.”

Seiya finally steps inside the magic circle as well.

The moment I step foot outside the glowing magic circle, I immediately feel cold. Snow is falling from the cloudy sky, slowly packing on top of the rooftops of the wooden houses scattered about.

“This is the town of Iglu.”

“Brrr... It's so cold...and I was just getting over being frozen by ice magic...”

I know how Cerceus feels. But this time, it isn't a magic-induced cold but nature itself. Flashika pulls his hood back over his head.

“I apologize for the extreme difference in temperatures. The magic circle warped us far away from the Edona Village to the cold northern continent of Alphoreiz.”

“Alphoreiz... W-wait! Isn't this where the Demon Lord was?!”

“You are correct. Mankind has survived and escaped the wrath of the dragonewts only because of the powerful force field surrounding this continent where the late Demon Lord's ambitions still linger.”

The continent where Seiya and I fought the Demon Lord is now the only place mankind can survive. It's a strange feeling.

“Anyway, I'm just glad we're finally in a town with humans. I feel like I can relax now.”

I agree with Cerceus, then survey the area. Men and women of all ages, wearing tattered clothing, stand around us and stare from beside the snow-

covered trees. The clothes are basically thin rags, just barely enough to keep them alive in the cold. Even the people of Little Light—the underground settlement back in Ixphoria—were dressed slightly better than this.

“This town seems to have its own share of hardships. Right, Sei—huh?!”

I’m shocked when my eyes find Seiya again. A powerful aura is emanating from his body, and his hair has already turned crimson!

“Wh-why did you suddenly enter berserker mode?!”

“Look.”

When I look in the direction Seiya is pointing, I see demons mixed in with the humans. They seem to be whispering in the humans’ ears.

“What the...?! Demons...! There are demons here...!”

“Wh-what is going on with this town?!”

Cerceus and I shout, but Flashika meekly smiles.

“Do not worry. They mean you no harm. We are only able to live here safely because of their aid. Humans and demons worked together to create this powerful force field that not even the Dragon Lord can destroy.”

“So you’re living with demons now?!”

“Yes. Iglu is a town where both humans and demons can coexist.”

Wh-what’s going on here?! Just how warped does a world have to be for *this* to make sense?!

A distorted realm ruled by a Dragon Lord... It appears this place is very, very different from the Gaeabrande Seiya and I remember.

Just then, I feel a chill run down my spine. It isn’t because the temperature lowered, though. It’s fear. It’s the evil aura of a powerful monster, and it appears my gut was right. A demon trudges toward us through the snow, then greets us in an alluring voice.

“Flashikaaa, so this is the Hero and Goddess you spoke of...”

Her appearance is far different from the other generic-looking demons around here. Despite the cold, her clothing amounts to little more than a bikini.

Her hair is the pitch-black of raven feathers, and her body is so captivating, I can barely look away.

Th-this can't be happening...!

Seiya places a hand on the sheath at his hip and gets into position for battle. While we're on the edge, just waiting for battle, she affectionately smiles and greets us in an all-too-familiar way: "It's a pleeeasure to welcome you to our dimension, O Hero chosen by the Goddess. I am Chaos Machina, one of the *former* generals of the Demon Lord's army."



CHAPTER 12

Savior

As the snow quietly falls, piling up on the ground, the demon gently smiles at us while showing no signs of hostility.

Chaos Machina...?! But Seiya cut her to ribbons!

This is warped Gaeabrande. If Seiya was never here like the dragonewt claimed, then that means Chaos Machina was never killed. While I can understand that, it's still eerie to see a monster we already killed once before. As I watch Seiya with his sword drawn and ready to attack at any moment, Chaos Machina sticks out her red tongue and licks her lips.

"Oh, myyy. How scary. Come on, now. Let's be friends."

Flashika suddenly inserts himself between Seiya and Chaos Machina.

"H-Hero...! Please stay your blade! As I mentioned a moment ago, we are working alongside the demons!"

"Yes, yes, yessssss... Together, we must defeat those wretched dragonewts."

"...Do you seriously think I'd trust a demon?"

You don't even have to be as cautious as Seiya to understand how he feels. I'm of the same mindset. Cerceus hides behind Seiya as well while nodding.

"I understand why you may be doubtful, however... Chaos Machina, do you have it with you?"

"Yes, I doooo."

She pulls an old slip of paper from her cleavage. Flashika then holds it in our direction so we can see it. In the center of the paper is a magic circle and something written in bloodred...ink?

"The ancient script says as follows: 'Demons shall not harm humans, for this is the pact we made and shall give our lives for.'"

“Tee-hee... They caaall this a Testament. A former general of the Demon Lord’s army named Kilkapul created it.”

“K-Kilkapul...!”

“Hmph. The monster that pretended to be a dwarven shopkeeper.”

Seiya frowns. He was the general who summoned the God of Death, Crossed Thanatos! We would have never defeated that thing if it weren’t for Valkyrie and her Gate of Valhalla!

“I’m even more skeptical of that treaty now.”

“Well, aren’t you the waryyy one, Hero. But this pact possesses a magical pooower. If a demon were to break it and kill a human, they would die as well.”

I do sense a powerful magical force overflowing from the back. I decide to use Appraise on it just in case... And sure enough, Chaos Machina isn’t lying. “*Any demon who breaks the pact shall die.*” Just like the summoning list Brahma gave me, which said I couldn’t summon Seiya, this pact possesses a powerful binding force, which was created by a tremendous magical and divine power.

...And yet Seiya still doesn’t believe it.

“Anyone could simply rewrite what it says.”

“Not at all, my deeeear. Once a pact has been written, it can never be changed.”

“Should it become necessary, you’re planning on destroying it even if you have to use force, aren’t you?”

“This pact cannot be destroyed no matter whaaat.”

“Oh? Then put it on the ground right there.”

After staring at the pact on the ground for a few moments, Seiya puts on his leather gloves and picks it up with both hands.

“Hmph!”

He lets out a somewhat strained grunt. It looks like he’s trying to rip the pact in half, but the thin piece of paper doesn’t even wrinkle.

“Berserk: Phase Two.”

A dark crimson aura immediately explodes from within him! Flashika and Chaos Machina step back.

“Oh, myyy! So this is the power of the Hero!”

“Incredible...!”

While they watch in utter surprise, Seiya continues trying to rip the paper with all his might. Nevertheless, he isn’t even able to leave a mark on it after battling it for a full minute. And yet...

“...Maximum Inferno...The First Valkyrja: Shattered Break.”

He follows up the high-level fire magic with a Technique of Destruction, but he is unable to scratch the pact.

“S-Seiya! Chaos Machina is telling the truth! The pact can’t be destroyed!”

“Tee-hee. See? Nothing works.”

Chaos Machina watches Seiya, amusement plain on her face.

“I’m not done yet...! I can probably tear it if I just use Gate of Valhalla...!”

“Seiya?! You’d kill yourself, too, if you do that! Why are you so desperate to destroy it?!”

It must be pretty frustrating for Seiya. He lets out a “hmpf,” then looks the other way as if he has finally given up. *Sigh...* He’s not an idiot, so I’m sure he’s not going to sacrifice himself just so he can rip a stupid piece of paper...right?

“H-Hero, the facts speak for themselves! We have been living with the demons for a long time without conflict! In addition, our wisemen engaged in much debate during the negotiations of the pact and already thoroughly investigated each and every last letter of it! Not even someone with the powers of the Demon Lord could destroy it!”

“You can explain all you want, but I still don’t trust them.”

“Seiya, that’s enough! We’re just arguing in circles now... Anyway, Flashika, are we going to go meet Rosalie now or what?”

“Yes, that is the plan.”

Seiya clicks his tongue.

“Hurry up, then. You’re wasting our time.”

“...?! Do you know how long you spent trying to rip that stupid piece of paper?!”

“Oh, myyy. We have quite the self-centered Hero on our hands. All right, allow me to take you to the princess. Follow me.”

We keep our distance as we follow Chaos Machina. On the way, I see demons and humans working together shoveling snow around dilapidated buildings.

They really are coexisting. It’s a sight to behold.

All of a sudden, Chaos Machina looks back at Cerceus.

“So I’ve been wondering... Are you their servant?”

“What...?! I’m a god, too, you know!”

“Ohhh? You are?”

“Yes! Can’t you tell by my divine aura!”

“Ohhh, is that sooo? You’re a god, huh? Good for youuu.”

“You’re not being sarcastic, right?! Right?!”

While watching their exchange, I whisper to Seiya:

“I don’t sense any bloodlust coming from her. She is making fun of Cerceus, though.”

“Don’t let your guard down, Rista. Check out her stats.”

“Huh?”

I use Scan just like Seiya told me to.

Chaos Machina

Lv: 87

HP: 156749 MP: 8578

ATK: 145871 DEF: 142180 SPD: 135789 MAG: 6666 GRW: 845

Resistance: Wind, Water, Fire, Earth

Special Abilities: Magic Sword (LV: MAX)

Skills: Demonic Curse

Personality: Cruel

“See what I mean? Her stats are far higher than they were last time.”

“You’re right! I wonder why, though?”

“This is a warped world. She must have obtained some sort of power she normally wouldn’t have, similar to how Mersais’s Hero was able to increase her berserker phase past the limit.”

“But how...?”

“Hell if I know. At any rate, do not let your guard down no matter what happens or who you meet from now on.”

“O-of course!”

Chaos Machina’s personality is still “cruel.” I was planning on exercising caution around the demons in town with or without Seiya’s warning, but his face remains stern.

“Do you really understand what I’m trying to tell you? Remember, I said ‘no matter who you meet.’”

“Huh?”

“...We have arrived.”

Flashika points to a run-down shack, bringing our conversation to an abrupt end.

Rosalie’s in there?

Rosalie is the princess of Roseguard, so I figured she’d be living in a castle like she used to. When we’re brought inside, it ends up being far more spacious than I imagined. There are soldiers with soot-covered faces gathered around a

bonfire. There's a woman in the center of the group. While Flashika explains to her that we're the Hero and Goddess, the woman glares at me, but only with one eye. She's wearing a black eyepatch over the other one.

"A-are you...Rosalie?"

"That I am. Rosalie Roseguard."

Her voice is the same, but her beautiful azure hair is now completely white. Her armor seems slightly tarnished. She seems like a completely different person. Nevertheless, I feel relieved to see someone I know and say: "I see you've been through a lot, Rosalie. You look all grown up."

"What an odd thing to say. I believe this is the first time we've met."

"O-oh yeah! Sorry!"

"And I believe being thirty years old would indeed make me 'all grown up.'"

"...! You're thirty?"

What the...?! I remember Rosalie being way younger than that! Seiya mutters by my side: "It appears even time itself was warped, so now we have the off-brand 'Worn-Out Rosalie.'"

"...Who are you calling 'worn-out'?"

Rosalie glares at Seiya. Sensing turbulence, Flashika suddenly tells her: "The Goddess and Hero defeated the Blazing Dragon Hydral!"

Rosalie's eyebrows slightly rise, but she eventually lets out a deep sigh.

"I wish you'd have come when mankind was on the verge of going extinct. I have no need for any Hero or Goddess anymore."

"B-But we did come! Seiya and I defeated the Demon Lord!"

"I have no idea what you're babbling on about."

"So, like, uh... This Gaeabrande isn't the real Gaeabrande—"

"Then where do you think we are?"

Seiya holds his arm out and stops me before I try to explain.

"You're wasting your time, Rista. This isn't the same Rosalie we know. Her

age...personality, and even stats are different.”

I notice a light in Seiya’s eyes as he stares at Rosalie, so I use Scan on her in a fluster as well.

Rosalie Roseguard

Lv: 68

HP: 127542 MP: 9865

ATK: 175415 DEF: 158644 SPD: 165431 MAG: 857 GRW: 72

Resistance: Fire, Water, Ice, Dark, Poison, Paralysis

Special Abilities: Blessing of Darkness (LV: 9)

Skills: Dagger Thrust

Personality: Eagerly Lying in Wait

Sh-she’s strong! And... “Blessing of Darkness”? Her status is nothing like it was last time!

Chaos Machina giggles. Does she know we’re using Scan?

“Are you surprised? The princess is even stronger than meee.”

“Where did she get such power?”

“I guess you could call it the ‘Demon’s Blessing’?”

“‘Demon’s Blessing’...?”

Rosalie casts a stern gaze at Chaos Machina, shutting her up. I want to know more about it, but Rosalie doesn’t seem to want to talk about it.

“At any rate, I want to check how much of a time difference there is between here and the real Gaeabrande.”

Seiya faces Rosalie and asks:

“When did you join forces with the demons?”

“Three years after the Dragon Lord defeated the Demon Lord and the dragonewts started their reign. We’ve been working together for the past ten years in order to defeat them.”

“A world where the Hero never appeared?! And over ten years have passed, to boot?!”

Cerceus groans behind me in equal surprise.

“We haven’t just been timidly running away, though. We have been developing teleportation magic circles using this town as our hub while disposing of dragonewts whenever the opportunity arises... We have suffered many losses as well, of course.”

Rosalie tightly clenches her jaws as if recalling a bitter past.

“The Dragon Lord’s powers are beyond imagination. Even the God of Death, Crossed Thanatos, who former General Kilkapul sacrificed himself to summon, was obliterated by the Dragon Lord’s blade.”

“What?! *That* Thanatos...?!”

Seiya wasn’t even able to defeat that! He had to escape to the spirit world and have Valkyrie use her ultimate attack, Gate of Valhalla, to finally get rid of it! And this Dragon Lord just defeated it himself?!

“Nonetheless, we still have to defeat the Dragon Lord. That is why we have been carefully preparing all these years.”

“Wh-what do you mean by ‘preparing’...?”

“Princess Rosalie...!”

A soldier rushes into the shack, gasping for air.

“Th-th-the sealed stone...! The magic-sealing stone has cracked!”

Immediately, the soldiers’ faces light up with excitement.

“F-finally...!”

“Our wish is finally going to come true!”

“Yes, it won’t be long before our savior is resurrected!”

Rosalie quietly gives the soldier a firm nod, then looks at Seiya and me.

“Allow me to thank you for defeating Hydral and his men. It appears that sped up the resurrection.”

“Wh-what...?”

Chaos Machina mirthfully laughs.

“After ten years of haaard work, she’s finally going to be resurrected! The legendary demon, more powerful than even the late Demon Lord, shall return...!”

“A legendary demon?! R-Rosalie...! You’re trying to resurrect someone as dangerous as that?!”

“Everything I do, I do to defeat the Dragon Lord.”

“But...!”

Rosalie suddenly shoots me a distant gaze.

“You have no idea how frightening the dragonewts are! They follow the teachings of the Seraph and brutally murder humans! They pried the organs out of my father, Wohlks Roseguard, while he was still alive before killing him!”

“What...?! The emperor’s...”

Rosalie runs a finger over her eyepatch to quell her rage.

“The final crusade between the Human-Demon Alliance and the dragonewts is about to begin.”

“Th-then let Seiya and I join you!”

“A human is no longer any match for the Dragon Lord Dragonight. He has grown far too powerful for the Hero to be of any help.”

“But Seiya can turn into a berserker, and he defeated Hydral easil—”

“No, thank you. This is going to be the end of our decade-long war.”

Seiya suddenly pulls me back by the shoulder.

“That’s enough, Rista. They’ve made up their minds.”

“B-but...!”

Dragonight is the one who warped Gaeabrande! Seiya and I eventually are going to have to defeat him.

But Seiya whispers into my ear:

“It would be in our best interest to have the Dragon Lord and the Human-Demon Alliance kill each other.”

“What the...?! What kind of half-assed plan is that?!”



“I’ve told you before. The best thing is to win without having to fight at all.”

“Seiya! You’re a Hero, aren’t you?! You’re acting like... Cerceus, say something!”

“Yeah, uh... Good thinking, Seiya! Having them both go down together would be the simplest way to settle things!”

“Y-you too?!”

As I find myself disgusted by the depraved Hero and trash god, Rosalie looks up at the ceiling with a serious expression.

“Surviving alongside demons... It has been ten years since we made that decision. My right-hand man, Bhat, and old man Carlo... So many people have died... However, all of our suffering is about to pay off...”

Rosalie speaks in a soft voice, but the force behind her words naturally causes me to swallow my breath. Her friends and her father were killed. I can’t even imagine how hard it was for her to endure the pain and wait all these years for a single moment.

“We are going to win! We are going to be cruel and callous as we kill the true enemy of both mankind and demons! Death to the Dragon Lord—”

Seething with rage, Rosalie continues:

“Death to Mash Dragonight!”

...? Mash...?!

Leaving It to Others

“Hey, um...Rosalie? This Mash person...”

“Mash Dragonight is the Dragon Lord’s name.”

The moment I hear that name, I visualize a boy, who is always cheerful and bright, wearing a bandanna over his light brown hair.

A fierce light glows in Chaos Machina’s eyes.

“He even turned his childhood friend into a sword to slaughter countless demons and humans!”

His childhood friend...?! She doesn’t mean Elulu, does she?! Th-that means his sword must be...Igzasion!

I wanted it to be just a misunderstanding, but my hope was almost immediately crushed. There is no doubting it! The Dragon Lord is *Mash*! And... And...Elulu is no longer...!

I panic. Seiya, however, speaks in a calm voice as he asks Rosalie: “Just to make sure, was that childhood friend’s name Elulu?”

“Yes. Even after death, they still worship her as the Seraph.”

This is a stunning and terrifying revelation to me. Seiya, on the other hand, doesn’t seem fazed in the slightest.

“I assumed so. If they were able to defeat both Crossed Thanatos and that Demon Lord, then using the holy sword Igzasion would be the only way other than Gate of Valhalla.”

“So Mash really did...”

But I stop myself, too frightened even to mutter the words “kill Elulu.” My head is going to explode. I feel only anxiety. But even if Mash did use the Igzasion, would he really be powerful enough to defeat the Demon Lord? More

important, I thought only the Hero could use the holy sword.

Seiya softly sighs.

“It looks like we’re going to need to stop Mash if we ever want to fix this warped world.”

“...! Y-yeah...!”

I firmly nod back at Seiya. H-he’s right! We don’t have to kill him. We just need to stop him! We know the real Mash. While strong-willed, he’s an honest, good kid. But since Seiya and I never showed up in this Gaeabrande, Mash must have taken on so much hardship all by himself, which could have made him lose his mind. I want to stop him, but there’s probably no point in telling Rosalie this right now.

“That’s all the more reason for us to help you, Rosalie. Let us join your fight!”

“...I’m pretty sure I already told you: I don’t need your help.”

“Seiya’s strong! He’d be a valuable asset to your army!”

“Beating Hydral is a feat deserving of praise. However, we, too, have successfully defeated high-ranking dragonewts over the past decade and reduced their number by half. Honestly, even Chaos Machina and I could have defeated a dragonewt of that level if we’d worked together.”

“*You*, Rosalie? Yeah, I don’t know...”

The Rosalie I know talked a big game like the old Reckless Seiya did, but the aura radiating from the woman before me is awe-inspiring.

Y-yeah, this Rosalie is extremely imposing! Even her stats are superhuman!

While hesitating, I notice Rosalie place a hand on Chaos Machina’s shoulder out of the corner of my eye.

“At any rate, I want to see the magic-sealing rock.”

“Yessss. Let’s go see the rock.”

“H-hey! Wait up!”

I chase after Rosalie in a fluster as they walk away, trying to leave us behind.

“Please forgive the princess for her rude behavior.”

Flashika apologetically bows to us as Rosalie and Chaos Machina trudge through the snow slightly up ahead. After bitterly smirking, I ask: “Flashika, what kind of monster is Rosalie trying to resurrect?”

“The legendary monster Lucifer Crowe. Long ago, the Demon Lord feared her, so he used a powerful dark spell to seal her away. She specializes in magic bows, and they say she could shoot an arrow from the Aness Plains to the top of Mount Glastora.”

“A-are you sure it’s okay to be resurrecting someone so dangerous? What if she attacks a human?”

“It is probably going to be difficult to explain our pact to the monster when she awakens, but we still have the Testament if something happens.”

“Uh-huh...”

They seem to be putting a lot of faith into that pact that Seiya couldn’t put a scratch on.

“Hm...”

I suddenly hear Cerceus grunt and whisper to him:

“You’ve got a bad feeling about this, too, don’t you? Resurrecting a monster that even the Demon Lord feared? Seriously?”

“No... I was actually thinking about Mash. That’s the kid I taught swordsmanship to a long time ago, right? I just can’t imagine that he’s now some cruel leader that rules over this world.”

“Oh, that? Yeah, I mean, I feel the same way.”

“He was a good kid. Don’t you think we could just talk to him and work things out?”

“Yeah, maybe he’s being controlled by someone evil. Of course, we’re not going to kill him. We’re just going to make him snap out of it... Right, Seiya?”

I smile at Seiya, but he simply continues to walk ahead in silence.

“Huh? Seiya...?”

Rosalie suddenly stops in front of a large stone building. It's a handsome piece of architecture that really stands out in this wasteland of a town. A demon with the head of an ox salutes Rosalie at the entranceway.

After following Flashika into the building, I immediately gasp...because there is a throng of demons of all shapes and sizes guarding a massive piece of black matter that's around five meters long.

"Is that the magic-sealing stone?"

It looks more like a crystal than a stone. A fissure runs through the jet-black surface, causing it to resemble a hatching egg. After Rosalie looks at the crack and nods, a demon next to her asks: "How much longer until she awakens?"

"Around a hundred more."

"A hundred more, huh? It's already that close."

Chaos Machina amusingly claps her hands together.

"My, my, myyy. It looks like Lucifer Crowe's going to awaken by the time the Demon's Sword special forces have finished their expedition."

The demons around her let out deep-voiced cheers. I get a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach from the demons celebrating and from the ominous aura flowing from the cracked stone.

"Um... I think it's probably best we don't resurrect this monster..." I timidly tell Rosalie. However, the air in the room suddenly changes along with the color on Rosalie's face.

"Resurrecting Lucifer Crowe is the fervent desire of humans and demons alike!"

"Y-yeah, I get that, but Seiya can—"

"Enough! I told you we have no need for a Hero!"

She then grabs me by the collar and fixes me with a frightening glare.

"Eep!"

"You're too late! Where were you thirteen years ago when the human race was on the verge of extinction?! This is all we have left!"

I want to tell her we did come, but there'd be no point. No matter what I say, the truth of the matter is that Seiya and I have never been to this warped world before.

"We don't need any Heroes or Goddesses!"

Rosalie lets go of me, then points at Cerceus, who's panicking by my side.

"And we definitely don't need an ordinary human soldier like that!"

"...?! Rude! I'm a god, too! You're the one who's just an ordinary human! You just have high stats. That's all."

"...I gave up being human."

"Excuse me? What is wrong with this woman?!"

Rosalie ignores Cerceus, despite that fact that he's lashing out at her, then quietly mutters: "Release."

Rosalie's right hand, which she is holding over her head, suddenly grows claws of black and red jumbled together. And rising from her arm...

"Whoa! A malicious aura...?! Eek!"

Cerceus throws himself back in an exaggerated fashion, as if he were under attack. That wasn't the case, of course. After rolling a few times, he begins to crawl over to me and doesn't hesitate to hide behind me. How can the Divine Blade be this frightened?! Rosalie's eye locks on to her wildly transformed arm as she smiles, almost self-deprecatingly.

"I applied a technique created by Deathmagla, a former general of the Demon Lord's army, and surrendered my body to the power of the demons to retaliate against the dragonewts."

Deathmagla...! That's the guy who made an undead army of ten thousand and created that monster Dark Firus, which was immune to everything except for physical attacks and ice magic!

"Rosalie! Are you going to be okay?!"

"Who knows...?"

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

“I don’t care what happens to me anymore. Even if I have to fall into the depths of darkness, I will defeat the Dragon Lord. I’m willing to put everything on the line, unlike you two.”

I’m left speechless; feeling threatened, even. Just like Rosalie, all the demons in the room are glaring at Seiya and me. The air is tense as an intimidating aura fills the spacious building. Chaos Machina smirks.

“Oh, Princess. Don’t be like thaaat. The Hero and Goddess just want to help.”

A few seconds go by until Rosalie faces me. Her eye shoots open wide, and she bows to me.

“You have my apologies. I just think about what would have happened if you had come to Gaeabrande sooner and... Well, I’m sure you had your reasons.”

“Y-yes... Uh...”

“Forgive my ill-mannered behavior. There is no doubt you would be valuable assets to our cause.”

Wow... Chaos Machina was actually able to persuade her to calm down. Humans and demons really do have a relationship built on trust...

“Goddess, Hero, do you think you could lend your aid to the Human-Demon Alliance?”

“Yes! We’d love to!”

The moment I shout in relief, Seiya turns a stern look on me. Then...

“Automatic Phoenix.”

A dozen fiery birds instantly soar out of his body, flapping their wings as they circle the room.

“S-Seiya?! What’s going on?!”

Not only Rosalie and I, but all of the demons look up at the ceiling and brace ourselves until Seiya nonchalantly says: “It was getting cold in here. This is warmer, right?”

Rosalie’s eye opens wide as she stares at the phoenixes crossing paths and flying about.

“Y-yeah, I guess the heat is making it slightly warmer...”

Rosalie looks puzzled, but I have no idea what’s going on, either! Did he seriously just use Automatic Phoenix because it’s cold?! Seiya, being a man of few words, doesn’t explain himself any further and turns his back to Rosalie and the others.

“First things first, I need to check out the item shop and weapon shop here... Let’s go.”

“H-hey, wait...! Seiya!”

Cercean and I chase after Seiya, leaving Rosalie to her stupor as we retire from the building.

“Wh-what is that?!”

“A bird created with fire magic?!”

“Why is he walking around with all of those monsters?!”

Seiya turns heads everywhere he goes in the village. It makes sense, though, since a few dozen Automatic Phoenixes are flying around and above us. Cercean and I follow closely behind Seiya while making ridiculous excuses like, “Ha-ha! These birds are so warm!” and “They’re kind of like our pets. Gwah-ha-ha!” But once there are no townspeople in sight, I immediately ask: “H-hey, Seiya? If you’re cold, I can grab your mantle out of the item pouch if you want it. I’m sure it’s around here somewhere...”

“I’m not cold.”

“What?! Then why...?!”

“They’re for protection.”

“Protection from...?”

“I knew you wouldn’t understand what I meant. I told you to never let your guard down no matter who you meet, right? That means Rosalie as well, obviously.”

“D-don’t tell me you think she might attack us...!”

“It’s possible. Her behavior clearly changed after Chaos Machina talked to

her.”

“But I didn’t sense any animosity coming from her.”

“She turned her arm into that of a demon’s, but she didn’t have a move called Release on her status screen.”

“G-good point! It’s probably not a spell or skill, then...”

“She might be hiding her hostility just like that as well. Whatever the case, be on your guard.”

It’s hard to believe someone as impulsive as Rosalie was deceiving us, but Mash and Rosalie in this world aren’t the Mash and Rosalie we know.

Seiya has a point. If Rosalie lost her mind like Mash, then we’re just going to have to *stop* her, too.

But Seiya shifts his distant gaze at the sky and firmly declares: “If Mash or even Rosalie gets in the way of reversing warped Gaeabrande, then killing them is the only option.”

“Whaaaaaaaat! I thought we were going to stop them!”

“Yes, from breathing.”

“Th-that’s what you meant by ‘stop’?!”

I scream at the not-so-heroic Hero, but he’s completely stone-faced as he glares back at me.

“What are you yapping on about anyway? While I don’t believe everything Hathies said, I did experience a warped world myself during the battle against the Death Keeper. There is no denying that this is an illusory world created by Mersais, and if Mash is the cause of the world’s distortion, then he has to die. That’s all there is to it.”

“...!”

“What the real Mash and Rosalie need is for us to destroy this warped illusory world as quickly as possible.”

Seiya’s sound argument shuts me up until he looks into the distance and points to where Rosalie and the others are.

“...And they—the Human-Demon Alliance—are going to be the ones who kill him.”

“What the hell?! I totally thought you were going to do it!!”

“They seem to thirst for blood, so I say let them have it. If Worn-Out Rosalie and the demons defeat Mash, then what more could you want?”

“Th-then what are you going to do?”

“Hm... I’ll just tell them I’ll protect the town, then use the free time to investigate ways to defeat Mersais.”

“You mean you’re going to go back to the underworld?!”

“Yes. But before that, I’m going to take a stroll around town. There’s probably nothing useful here, but just in case.”

Seiya then begins walking toward the center of town. I stare at his large back and sigh.

“Ugh... He’s acting like this has nothing to do with him.”

Cerceus, however, turns toward me with a mystified expression.

“But I don’t think he’s wrong. It doesn’t matter what happens in this world. It’s just an illusion created by Mersais, after all.”

“I guess you’re right, but...”

While I half agree with Cerceus, something just doesn’t feel right.

Is it really okay for us to be acting like idle spectators?

The Dragon Lord Mash reigns over the world with the holy sword Igzasion, but the Human-Demon Alliance is trying to resurrect the legendary demon Lucifer Crowe to have a chance to defeat him. A decisive war is about to begin. While Seiya is acting like it’s no concern of his, warped Gaeabrande is on the verge of a major upheaval.

Mimicry

Cerceus and I trudge along the snowy path after Seiya. It's probably easier to walk thanks to everyone having shoveled the snow earlier. We soon come to a long road with wooden buildings lined up on either side of it. Although some are dilapidated and have snow-covered roofs that looked like they could collapse at any minute, this part of the town feels the most alive so far, with many demons and humans crossing paths and chatting. This must be the heart of Iglu.

"Hmm. That's probably the item shop."

Seiya creases his eyes at a sign that does seem to be for an item shop. After opening the wooden door, we walk inside the hut to find the shelves packed with all different kinds of medicinal herbs. There are also swords and shields displayed on the walls.

"Wow. They have weapons here, too. I guess it's closer to a general store than an item shop."

We make ourselves at home and start checking out products, despite the shopkeeper being nowhere in sight. There are horrendous items in the shop as well, perhaps used by demons as good luck charms, but just as Seiya predicted, there isn't really anything that'd be useful for us on our journey. After looking through the store's items for a good while, all of a sudden, we hear a rattling coming from the back, followed by a young girl rushing over.

"S-sorry for the late introduction! Welcome to my shop! Is there anything I can help you with?"

She seems to be in her early teens with freckles on her cheeks. She's wearing her hair in two braids. Is she helping out with the shop? The innocent girl leaves a good first impression in my eyes, but Seiya looks down at her with disgust.

“You’re too careless. Your entire store would have been robbed clean by now if I were a thief.”

“I-I’m so sorry! I was preparing a few items in the back to put on display, and...ah...! A-a thief...?!”

The little girl looks at Cerceus and Seiya, and her face tenses.

“Seiya, stop saying stuff like that! You confused her! I’m sorry. We’re not thieves. He’s the Hero, and I’m the Goddess! And, uh... This buff guy is also a god, technically...and... Hm...?”

After taking a good look at her face, I am suddenly struck with déjà vu.

“Hey, have we met before?”

“No...”

“My name is Ristarte. What’s yours?”

“Nina.”

“Nina... Nina?! Wait! Did you used to live in Edona?”

“Y-yes, I did, actually! My father and I are from Edona!”

She isn’t the same age, but I can definitely recognize the little girl I met back then. When I first came to Gaeabrande and met her in Edona, she barely came up to my knees.

“Oh my...! Look how much you’ve grown!”

“Rista, you sound like someone’s grandmother.”

“Wh-who are you calling a grandmother?! ”

I glare at Cerceus, but I can’t help reacting the way I did, since it makes me so happy to see Nina all grown up like this. Before I even realize it, Nina is looking up at me with twinkles in her eyes.

“You really are a goddess! You even knew who I was!”

“Oh, um... I don’t really know *everyone*. I just, uh... Anyway, Nina, you’re working at a general store now, huh?”

“Yes. Ever since Rosalie gave me this job.”

“Rosalie did?”

“She invited all of the survivors to this town. My father and I used to travel from place to place to escape the dragonewts until we were brought to Iglu five years ago. I don’t have to be scared anymore, and it’s all thanks to Rosalie and Chaos Machina.”

In the Gaeabrande I know, Nina’s father was almost killed by Chaos Machina, but in this world, she is grateful to her. Hm... Fate is truly a mysterious thing.

“By the way, where’s your father? Do you two run the shop together?”

“No... My father passed away not too long ago...”

“Oh...”

This town seems safe, so I guess he got sick. Or did he get injured? Whatever the case, I feel bad for asking. The air grows cold and melancholy until it is drowned out by the thuds at the counter, where Seiya is placing stacks of weapons and items.

“The weapons are weak, and the items don’t seem like they’ll be of any use, but I might be able to Synthesize them into something decent. I’ll take your entire stock.”

“Seiya, wait! We don’t have any of the currency that is currently used in this Gaeabrande.”

“It’s fine. I already prepared an alternative to money.”

Seiya pulls something out of his pocket and drops it with a thud before Nina.

“Cercean’s horn.”

“Seriously?! Those again?!”

Those might be valuable in the underworld, but you can’t expect to use them as currency in any world you visit! It’s not like they’re made of gold!

But when I look over at Nina, her eyes open wide.

“I-is that the horn of a devil?! Those are so rare! I’ll pay anything you ask for it!”

“What the hell are those horns made of?! Cercean’s horns are seriously

amazing!”

“Tee-hee...!”

Cerceus blushes while boastfully crossing his arms for some reason. Is this really something to be proud of?! It’s not like he did anything special!

While cringing at Cerceus, Seiya suddenly grabs the few dozen swords he bought and thrusts them into Cerceus’s arms.

“Cerceus, carry these.”

“What?! A-all of them?!”

“You’re the God of Swords, right? Carry them.”

“That doesn’t mean I want to carry a bunch of swo—I-I’ll carry them! I’d love to! It’d be an honor!”

Cerceus changes his tone the moment he sees Seiya lift a sheath into the air, and he immediately begins stuffing the swords into the item pouch. After shopping, we start to leave the store when Nina suddenly runs over to us.

“Hey, um... Since you bought so much, I want to give you this. It’s nothing special, but I enjoy making these, so...”

She holds out a flower that has been pressed inside two pieces of parchment paper and sealed like a good luck charm.

Oh yeah! Now that I think about it, she gave Seiya a pressed flower when we first came to Gaeabrande!

I suddenly reminisce about the time the innocent little girl gave Seiya that pressed flower. I vaguely remember Seiya claiming it was probably cursed, but looking back, I’m sure he was just saying that to hide his embarrassment. This sure brings back memories. But as I fondly think about the past, I suddenly notice Seiya’s frowning.

“Just one? You don’t have a hundred?”

“What are you going to do with a hundred pressed flowers?! This isn’t an item for combat!”

“Hm... I’ve developed a habit of always asking, but I suppose you’re right, now

that I think about it. One is enough.”

“Ugh...!”

“After giving it a bit more thought, though, I don’t believe it’d be of any use to me... Yeah, I don’t need it.”

“What do you mean you ‘don’t need it’! It’s *one* flower! Take it, dammit, and stop being so rude!”

I yell while grabbing the flower as he tries to hand it back. Nina giggles while Seiya sighs.

“Come on. Let’s go. There’s nothing left for us to do here.”

“O-okay... Bye, Nina!”

“It was really nice meeting you. Have a safe journey. Bye-bye...”

After leaving the shop and saying good-bye to Nina, Seiya immediately demands that I open a gate to the underworld. But before I pass through, I turn around out of curiosity. Cerceus then casts a quizzical glance at me.

“What’s wrong, Rista?”

“No... It’s nothing.”

Nina’s smile... While it seemed cheerful at first, there was something about it that bothered me. It was as if there was a dark shadow hidden behind it. However...

“Ah! Seiya, wait!”

I catch Seiya walking through the gate without us, so I chase after him in a fluster.

“The underworld’s far more relaxing than Gaeabrande.”

“Yeah, it really is. All things considered, Uno’s house is actually pretty comfortable to live in.”

Cerceus and I chat all the way until we arrive at the front door of the Porta residence. Uno and Due immediately notice and welcome us in, all smiles.

“Welcome back! I am so glad you are all safe!”

Just like the spirit world, time moves extremely quickly in the underworld, so the few hours it took to defeat Hydral and check out Iglu were equivalent to several days in the underworld. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why Uno seems so happy to see me when she takes my hand. After walking us into the living room, Due asks me: "How did it go?"

"Well, we defeated this dragonewt called Hydral, but nothing really happened after that. We did proudly declare that we'd save warped Gaeabrande...but then we left."

I look expectantly at Seiya, since he was the one who talked a big game, but he nonchalantly adds: "'Mission: Let Rosalie and the Others Save Gaeabrande' is currently in progress."

"What kind of absurd mission name is that?"

"Oh, Rista. I am sure Seiya knows what he is doing. Anyway, shall I put on some tea for us?"

"I need to ask you something before you two have tea. There's a guy named Joker that lives on Seventh Avenue, right?"

"Y-yes."

Uno nods. Due then slaps his knees and says:

"Ohhh. Good idea."

"Learning Joker's special move could prove to be beneficial down the road."

J-Joker...? What kind of special move are they talking about?

The conversation continues as Seiya asks about this Joker and where he lives while Cerceus and I are left in the dark. It sounds like Seiya did a lot of investigating last time we were here and found the next person he wanted to train with.

"All right, let's go."

"Huh?! A-already? Can't we at least have tea befor—"

After Seiya grabs Cerceus by the scruff of his neck and drags him outside, we begin walking to "Seventh Avenue," wherever that is.

“Oh... It’s getting foggy...”

The underworld’s local specialty: Thick fog appears as we head to our destination. Nevertheless, Seiya continues briskly marching forward without even a hint of hesitation.

“Seiya, do you know where you’re going? Even in this dense fog?”

“I know the area around the Porta residence and the geography within a five-kilometer radius of the Shrine of the Six Realms like the back of my hand. A little fog won’t be a problem.”

“Oh. You’re always prepared, huh?”

“I plan on making a map of the underworld when I have more time, since it’d make training easier if I knew who lived where and what kind of skill set they had.”

“A map? But the underworld seems huge. Like, spirit-world-sized.”

“Hmph. I’ll show you. It doesn’t matter how long it takes me or how difficult it is, I’ll make one.”

“You’re acting like a person who dedicates their entire life to cartography... Seiya, you know that’s not your goal, right?”

“I know. That’s exactly why I’m going to meet Joker now.”

“Just who in the world is this Joker—”

Seiya quietly points ahead. The fog seems to have cleared up before I even realized it, and I find myself astonished by what I see ahead. Behind a large iron gate is a giant Ferris wheel, and beyond that are a merry-go-round, a roller coaster, and many other rides.

“Wh-what in the...? An amusement park?!”

“I had no idea they had these in the underworld, too!”

Wait... Hold on! Am I about to go on an amusement park date with Seiya?!

I fantasize to myself for a split second before realizing that there’s no one else around. The rides are rather old as well. It’s like they haven’t been used for decades. The mood’s definitely not great for a date, either. After following Seiya

past the ticket gate and walking slightly inside, I see a clown in a gaudy outfit with a pointy hat and red nose holding a sign that says: UNDERWORLD AMUSEMENT PARK.

“Is that a puppet?”

I timidly approach the clown when...

“Welcome to the super-fun Underworld Amusement Park!”

“Ahhh?!”

It was, in fact, not a puppet. The clown suddenly greets us with a shout, but it’s immediately followed by a hushed silence. I look across what appears to be ruins as a cold wind blows by until the clown sorrowfully smiles.

“This place used to be bustling with life, but before I knew it, it turned into this.”

“Wh-what happened?”

“Who knows. One day, everyone just decided to stop coming here to play, it seems.”

“...Are you Joker?”

“Yes, I am Joker, leader of the circus troupe.”

“A circus troupe? There are others here, too?”

“I’m the only one left. Everyone else disappeared, just like the customers. First it was one. Then it was two. And then eventually, they were all gone...”

Cerceus whispers to me:

“I-I’ve got a bad feeling about this guy.”

“Y-yeah, he’s kind of freaking me out.”

This clown hasn’t been abducting all these people, right...? Nevertheless, I muster up the courage and ask: “So, Joker, what kind of moves do you know?”

Joker’s red lips curl into a smile.

“So, Joker, what kind of moves do you know?”

“What the...?!”

I shriek in astonishment...because Joker just parroted everything I just said, using *my* voice!

“Wow. That sounded just like Rista!”

“Yes. This must be his special move.”

“Wait... So his skill is Mimicry?!”

Right as Seiya nods, Joker repeats in my voice:

“Wait... So his skill is Mimicry?!”

W-wow! He really does sound like me! But...

“Anyway, cool. Thanks. We get it now, so do you think you could stop copying me?”

“Anyway, cool. Thanks. We get it now, so do you think you could stop copying me?”

“It’s getting kind of annoying...”

“It’s getting kind of annoying...”

“I’m serious. Can you stop?”

“I’m serious. Can you stop?”

“I’m not joking. Really.”

“I’m not joking. Really.”

My frustration soon reaches its peak, and I grab the clown by the lapels.

“That’s enough, dammit! I told you to stop! No wonder everyone left you!”

Joker’s eyes suddenly open wide, and his shoulders droop.

“S-so that’s why everyone disappeared...!”

Uh-oh... M-maybe I shouldn’t have said that. Seiya gently pats Joker on the shoulder and tries to cheer him up.

“Don’t let it bother you. That technique is extremely valuable. You can Mimic not only people’s voices but their skills as well, right?”

Joker’s smile returns as if Seiya snapped him out of a dark place.

“Of course! My imitations are spot-on!”

“M-mimicking your opponent’s skills...?”

“And if I manage to master his Mimicry, it won’t matter how powerful my opponent’s moves are, since I can simply copy and neutralize them.”

That would be extremely useful! But is something like that really even possible? Seiya places a hand on his chin in contemplation.

“Even if the Divine Hero manages to raise her berserker to Phase Four, I might be able to win if I can Mimic it.”

“What?! You plan on copying her Phase Four Berserk Mode?! I don’t know, Seiya. It’s—”

“It’s worth a shot.”

Seiya pulls one of Cerceus’s horns out of his pocket and holds it in front of Joker.

“You need to offer something in return whenever you want something in the underworld, right? You can have this if you teach me that skill.”

But Joker shakes his head.

“It has a lot of HP, but it’s still not enough to make a deal.”

“Oh? Greedy, aren’t we? How many do you want, then? A dozen? Two dozen?”

“S-Seiya?! Please don’t give him that many! Having my horns removed hurts!”

“Shut up, or I’ll snap something else off as well.”

“Eek!”

Cerceus immediately places both hands over his crotch in a defensive gesture and quiets down, but Joker stares hard at me instead.

“What is she the goddess of?”

“I’m the Goddess of Healing.”

“Then let’s have the Goddess of Healing help. Right this way.”

Wh-why do I have a terrible feeling about this?!

Joker trundles onward until he stops before a large circus tent, which he promptly enters. I follow him shortly behind, then scream: “Animals?!”

Many caged animals are scattered around the room. There are beasts that resemble Earth’s lions, tigers, and even bears. Oh, my!

“Rista, look! There are monsters here!”

I follow Cerceus’s gaze to find large cages with dragons and chimeras inside. Joker puffs up with pride.

“I’m interested in creatures from worlds other than my own! I collect monsters and even animals from Earth as well!”

“Wh-what do you plan on doing with me?”

The jester grins.

“You’re going to strip down to your underwear and step into a cage for me.”

“I beg your pardon...?!”

He’s joking, right?! A cage?! Why?! And in my underwear?! Don’t tell me he’s planning on...

“I’m not going to be violated by those monsters, right?!”

“What are you talking about? I don’t want you to enter a monster cage. I want you to get into this one.”

Joker points at cage containing a giant mountain gorilla.

“I want you to get in this cage and act like an ape!”

“What the...?! Why?!”

“Rista, he just wants the HP you’re going to emit from doing that.”

“Th-then why can’t Cerceus do it?!”

“Hey?! Stop trying to sacrifice me to save yourself!”

But Joker shakes his head.

“Making someone who’s basically already a gorilla act like a gorilla won’t generate any HP.”

“Ha-ha! Did you hear that?! I can’t do it because I’m pretty much a gorilla already! ...Wait a second! That’s messed up!”

“Why do I have to be in my underwear anyway?!”

“I just thought it would be easier for you to beat your chest that way.”

“You’re going to make me beat my chest, too?! I’m a goddess, you know! You understand that, right?!”

I go ballistic on him, but Seiya steps in between Joker and me.

“Just do it. Learning Joker’s special move is going to help us save the spirit world.”

“But forcing a goddess to act like a gorilla? Give me a break... Huh?! S-Seiya?!”

Seiya wraps me in his arms and slowly begins to undress me!

Wh-wh-what’s going on? Seiya’s taking off my clothes... S-stop, Seiya... You’re turning me on... *Hff...! Hff...! Hff...!*

As my imagination runs wild, I suddenly hear a clink.

“Huh?!”

...And by the time I realize it, I’m in the same cage as a mountain gorilla with a thick coat of black fur. Joker chuckles in utter amusement.

“Come one, come all! Gather around to witness the performance of the one and only ‘Goddess Gorilla’! Let the show begin!”

“‘Goddess Gorilla’?! ”

And that’s how I was forced to act like a gorilla in my underwear.

A Goddess's Worth

The underworld's jester watches me with a fiery gaze.

Unbelievable! Am I really going through with this?! Being in my underwear is embarrassing enough. But do I really have to act like an ape?!

The gorilla scratches its butt, totally ignoring my presence.

Th-this can't get any worse! But Seiya's right. I have to do it for the spirit world! I'm going to do it, Ishtar!

After mustering up enough courage, I begin scratching my butt while copying the sound gorillas make.

"Oo-oo..."

For some reason, Joker looks dejected.

"Gorillas don't actually say 'oo-oo' like that. Watch your new friend more closely, and keep the improv to a minimum, please."

"Rista, stop fooling around."

Seiya's distant voice reverberates. Even Cerceus raises his voice and expresses his disapproval.

"Yeah! What do you think you're doing, making up noises?! We want to see you imitate a gorilla! Not make up your own original gorilla character!"

"...?! When I get out of here, you're deeeeeead, Cerceus!!"

He sure knows how to piss me off.

Driven over the edge, I grab on to the cage's bars and begin violently shaking them while glaring at him. How dare *he* mock anyone, let alone me!!

"Phew! I'd hate to be that gorilla right now! Scaaary!"

"I-it's hard to believe she's a goddess. Okay! Just follow my instructions!"

Joker watches the gorilla while giving me orders.

“First, walk around the cage just like the gorilla.”

I follow behind the gorilla with a forward-leaning posture until she suddenly stops and starts beating her chest.

W-wow... I had no idea the real thing sounded so nice...

“Okay, Goddess, your turn!”

“...”

I beat my chest with both hands, but it doesn't sound as nice as when the gorilla did it, and my breasts jiggle from side to side. I imitated a fish-person back in Ixphoria after being turned into one, but this time I still look like myself, which makes this even more embarrassing than it has to be.

“Good! Now eat a banana!”

“Munch, munch, munch...”

“Groom yourself for lice next!”

“I don't have any lice!”

Prrrt!

“Okay, now fart!”

“What do I look like, a whoopee cushion?!”

“Eat another banana!”

“Munch, munch, munch...”

I actually like bananas, so I savor every bite. The gorilla, on the other hand, seems to have gotten tired of peeling halfway through, so she stuffs the rest of it down her throat, peel and all.

“All right, Goddess! Eat the peel, too!”

“Seriously?!”

Why do I, a goddess, have to eat a banana with the peel still on? Wait, Ristarte. Remember the past. You ate a death worm! A banana peel is nothing compared to that! I can do this!

Munch... Blech! It's so bitter! Banana peels are bitter!

Unable to stomach it, I immediately vomit, and tears roll down my cheeks, thanks to my compounded mental anguish.

Ugh... Why me...?! Cerceus and Seiya are probably laughing at me as I make a fool of myself in my underwear!

I glance over in their direction, only to see absolute pity in their eyes.

"I can't watch this anymore."

"I know what you mean, Seiya. It's like watching a stand-up comedian who keeps bombing."

"...?! Stop looking at me like that!"

"Goddess! You have to imitate the gorilla!"

...I wonder how long I've been doing this. I continue to act like a gorilla for quite a while after that. By the time I start forgetting I'm a goddess and actually start to believe I'm a gorilla, Joker suddenly claps.

"Phew! Thank you very much! I've received tons of HP! You were a marvelous gorilla!"

"Just let me out of here already! We're done, right?"

"Yep. We can begin now. Come here."

After I leap out of the cage and swiftly get back into my dress, Joker waves me over. However, Seiya grabs Joker's shoulder and stops him.

"Hold on. I think you're confused. She's not going to be learning your skill. I am."

"What?! Oh, really?! If I knew that, I wouldn't have pushed her so hard to mimic that gorilla! Well, that was pretty pointless, huh?"

"...?! Aaaaaaaah!!"

Joker ignores my scream and faces Seiya.

"I don't know if a human will be able to do it, but let me show you how it's done."

Ugh! What is wrong with this clown?! ...Hold up! Is Seiya going to have to act like a gorilla now? I kind of want to see that...

“Should I go inside the cage with the gorilla, too?”

“No, you don’t have to do anything ridiculous like that.”

...?! I’m going to murder this stupid clown!!

But despite saying Seiya doesn’t have to Mimic the gorilla, Joker walks inside the cage and brings the gorilla out. Then, while maintaining a smile, he grabs the whip at his waist and...

“What the...?!”

He whips the gorilla’s stomach! The violent lash echoes along with the sound of flesh tearing, causing the gorilla to groan in a deep voice. Blood soon escapes her wound and begins dripping onto the floor.

“Wh-what’s wrong with you?! Don’t hurt her!”

“Then why don’t you heal her, Goddess of Healing?”

“I don’t need you to tell me that! Man, this clown is such a scumbag!”

I approach the whimpering gorilla and start using a healing spell on her wound.

“Everything’s okay now...”

Before I even know it, however, Joker is standing next to me with his hands over the gorilla’s wound as well. When I look over, I see a rainbow aura flowing from his body, which I had never seen before.

“Interesting. Okay, I can do it, too, now.”

“Y-you can do what now?”

A pale light suddenly flows from Joker’s hands just like mine.

I-is he...?!

I stop healing the gorilla for a moment, which confirms my suspicions. Despite pausing my spell, her wound is still healing!

“No way! How are you able to Mimic a deity’s skill like that?! What’s the

trick?!”

“There is no trick. This is just what I do.”

“It appears to transcend magic theory similar to how Valkyrie’s Gate of Valhalla transcends causality.”

Seiya mutters to himself, causing Joker to raise his arms into the air with an expression of clear admiration.

“Wow! You even know about Gate of Valhalla!”

“The Goddess of Destruction taught it to me in the spirit world a while back.”

“That’s amazing! Maybe you really can learn my special move, even though you’re a human!”

Joker seems excited, but I’m more surprised that he knows about Gate of Valhalla. Valkyrie is the second highest-ranking deity in the spirit world, so maybe she’s well known in the underworld as well?

“All right, then. First, let’s have you Mimic Rista’s healing.”

“What?! But that’s literally impossible! I know Seiya’s amazing, but he’s not going to be able to use my healing magic! Even Aria said so!”

“The underworld’s abilities aren’t bound by the rules of the spirit world. You know that firsthand, since you saw how Xul Luxu’s special move allowed me to learn ice magic.”

“B-but...!”

“Just shut up and watch, Gorista.”

“Who are you calling ‘Gorista’?! I’m not even acting like a gorilla anymore!”

Joker’s lips curl with amusement as he says to Seiya: “Let me give you some of my aura before we begin. First, you need to be able to form this rainbow aura and maintain it.”

“I see.”

Seiya stares hard at Cerceus and me.

“I need to focus while I train. Rista, come back tomorrow. You too, Cerceus.”

“O-okay...”

Not wanting to get in the way as usual, I quietly take my leave.

When Cerceus and I return to Joker’s circus tent the next day, Seiya is facing Joker while sitting in the lotus position. His hands are forming a mudra. I jump... because a rainbow aura is already flowing from Seiya’s hands.

“You already learned how to form the rainbow aura?!”

“Yes. You just gradually change the hues from red to blue, then to green, and so on. Once you understand the basics, it’s easy.”

“He figured it out way faster than I thought he would. Pretty amazing for a human.”

W-well, this is Seiya we’re talking about. Looking back, he’s probably always had a natural aptitude for Mimicry...

“All right, then. Now that the Goddess is here, let’s have you actually try to Mimic her healing magic.”

But when Joker grabs his whip and starts walking toward the gorilla’s cage, Seiya stops him.

“If you need a gorilla, then you might as well use this one.”

Seiya then unsheathes his sword and slashes Cerceus across the back before anyone can say anything. Cerceus screams.



“Gwaaaaaah!”

H-he just cut Cerceus with a real sword! It doesn't matter that deities can't die! That was brutal!

“Ow, ow, owwww! Ristaaaaaa! Heal me! Hurryyyyyy!”

Cerceus's wound would end up healing on its own, but I can't watch him bawl his eyes out like this anymore.

“F-fine. Hold on.”

I raise my hands near the cut on his back and cast a healing spell... Hm? Upon closer inspection, I realize that Seiya gave him only a light flesh wound. Cerceus always overreacts...

While rolling my eyes and healing his paper cut, I realize that Seiya's standing so close to me that I can feel him breathing.

“...Memorized.”

The moment Seiya mutters those words, he lightly pushes me out of the way. Even though I've stopped healing Cerceus, Seiya places a hand over Cerceus's wound and begins to heal it!

“S-S-Seiya's using healing magic?!”

“Wow! It doesn't hurt anymore! You're amazing, Seiya!”

“I still need to perfect it, though.”

Seiya thereupon slashes Cerceus's back once more without a shred of hesitation.

“Eek!”

Seiya then holds his hands out before Cerceus's back, and a faint light heals his cut.

“Huh...? It doesn't hurt anymore...”

Seiya slashes Cerceus's back yet again.

“Gwah?! ”

He places a hand on the wound again.

“Huh...? It doesn’t hurt... It doesn’t hurt...but can you quit it already?!”

Cerceus pleads, but his cries fall on deaf ears as Seiya simply stares at his hands.

“What’s the meaning of this? The rainbow aura disappeared.”

“You can only Mimic a spell for a few minutes at most. After the aura vanishes, you need to watch the original move once more and memorize it again. The more proficient you become in creating the rainbow aura, the longer you’ll be able to maintain it.”

“I see... Hold on. I’ve lost an obscene amount of MP. I only have two-thirds of my usual total left.”

“It probably takes a lot of magic power for a human to use my special move.”

“Dammit. This move has far more limitations than I thought,” Seiya mutters with a scowl.

Not only does it have a short time limit, but it uses a lot of MP as well, which is probably a big problem for Seiya, since losing even 10 MP bothers him.

“Oh, well. It looks like I simply need to focus on forming the rainbow aura with Joker so I can increase my Mimic duration.”

Seiya spends the next few days with Joker to continue training in his tent.

“I wonder if Seiya’s training’s going well.”

“Who knows? But at least things are peaceful around here.”

Cerceus is cheerfully stirring his meringue in the kitchen. As always, we spend our days idling in the Porta residence.

“So can I ask what you’re doing?”

“What does it look like? I’m baking a cake. I feel like I’m finally back to doing what I’m meant to be doing. This is my calling. I’d love to be able to open a café in the underworld one day.”

“Cerceus, your calling is being a swordsman. Plus, you’re coming with us on our journey from now on, so you don’t have time to relax and open a café in the underworld.”

“Tch. Always ruining my fun. Can’t Seiya just handle things himself?”

Cerceus clearly isn’t holding back his complaints since Seiya isn’t here. But right at that moment, the kitchen door creaks open. It’s Seiya.

“Oh, Seiya! I hope your training went well! I baked a cake for you! I hope you like it!”

“I’d rather die. More importantly, I mastered Joker’s rainbow aura. Now I just need to practice.”

“So you can use Mimic longer now?”

“Yes. I managed to extend my time to a maximum of three minutes. I tried to increase my time limit beyond that several times, but I was unsuccessful. I was honestly hoping I could extend the time to around thirty years, but...”

“J-just how long were you planning on practicing?!”

“Uh... Anyway, I’ll just be over there baking a cake...”

Seiya knits his brows, ignoring Cerceus as he makes his swift escape.

“The skill has several drawbacks, though. Not only does it consume a large amount of MP, but I also need to see my opponent’s skill in advance before I can even Mimic it.”

“Oh. Huh.”

“In other words, I run the risk of being a step behind my opponent in battle. Of course, I’ve already come up with a countermeasure. For example, using Cerceus as a meat shield to see the enemy’s move first could work. In addition —”

A plate suddenly shatters at the back of the kitchen.

“I heard something extremely unsettling when I was trying to bake my cake! Could you please *not* say things like that?!”

Seiya briskly walks toward the back of the kitchen and glares at Cerceus.

“Cerceus, it’s time to train. Come.”

“Eek! Don’t tell me you’re going to cut me again!”

“I’ve mastered Rista’s healing magic already. Today, we’re going to be practicing something different. First, I need you to get into Demon Mode...”

It’s been a full day since Seiya dragged Cerceus away. Feeling a bit lonely, I sip some tea on the veranda until Uno suddenly asks: “Where is Seiya?”

“He’s apparently undergoing the final phase of training with Cerceus. He’s Mimicking Cerceus’s swordsmanship in Demon Mode.”

“...Rista, you seem down.”

She sees right through me, and I sigh deeply.

“I’m bummed because Seiya can use my healing magic now. I know he can only use it for a few minutes, but it’s still depressing.”

I’ve never been that helpful, and now the thing that only I can do is being Mimicked. Of course I’d be depressed. Plus, it doesn’t help that Cerceus is actually contributing more to Seiya’s training than I am.

Uno suddenly smiles, a thought rising to the forefront of her mind.

“Cerceus turned into a demon and learned the skill Demon Slash, right? Maybe you can do something now which you have never been able to do as well.”

Oh yeah! I haven’t tried it once since the day I learned how to do it, but maybe I have new powers, too!

“All right, I’ll give it a try!”

I get into a handstand and use Type: Opposite to turn into a demon, transforming me into a sexy imp in a leather dress.

“Let’s test your healing magic first.”

Uno suddenly places a finger in her mouth and bites right through her skin! Fresh blood trickles down her arm and drops to the ground.

“U-Uno?!”

“Please do not let it bother you. Come, now. Give your healing magic a try.”

She just bit into her own finger! Just how reckless are the people of the underworld?! Regardless, this is the perfect opportunity for me to test out my

healing magic, so I give it a try.

“Hm... It doesn’t seem to be any different...”

“Really? Then let’s test out something else.”

I decide to try out a few things, like testing if I can pick up heavy objects and flying, but unlike Cerceus, my physical capabilities haven’t really increased. I make fun of him a lot, but he is the God of Swords at the end of the day. His stats are way higher than mine. It seems that even multiplying the stats of a healer still won’t make them anything special.

“Sigh... It’s hopeless...”

Returning to my funk, I lower my gaze. My cleavage is bursting out of my sexy leather outfit through the generous boob window.

Oh, hey. I think my breasts got a little bigger... Ugh! All I got from Demon Mode were bigger boobs?!

I inwardly mock myself. While annoyed and staring at my enlarged bust, which seems easily achievable with supplementation alone, I notice that there’s something stuck between them.

“Hey. This is Nina’s...”

It’s the pressed flower that Nina gave us. However, the instant I grab it, I have a vision.

“Sniffle... Dad... Daddy...!!”

While I’m sure I’m standing on the veranda, I can see a dark room in front of me with Nina inside, sobbing all by herself.

Homecoming

“Is something the matter, Rista?”

“Huh?!”

I return to my senses at the sound of Uno’s voice. My vision of Nina lasted only a split second. Was I imagining things? But the vision seemed far too clear to be just my imagination!

“Oh, um... I just had a vision of the girl who made this, but she was crying.”

“You have the ability Appraise, right? Are you sure you didn’t unconsciously use it?”

“It was nothing like when I use Appraise. This is the first time I’ve... Wait.”

This wasn’t the first time I’ve experienced something like this. When I was in Ixphoria and was talking to Queen Carmilla—my mother from my human life—she showed me a doll. But when I touched it, memories of my past life suddenly played out in my head.

After explaining this to Uno, she firmly nods.

“It sounds like Demon Mode has helped refine your skills. You have most likely learned Appraise’s highest-level skill.”

“Its highest-level skill?! Seriously?!”

“The ability to visualize thoughts left behind in items—I believe that is your new power, Rista.”

“Y-you mean like psychometry?! Yes!! That’s so cool!”

“It seems to be closer to a specialized capability than a skill. You are probably only able to visualize these thoughts thanks to your deity brain waves. It isn’t something you could Mimic easily, even using Joker’s special move.”

Seiya was able to copy the only thing that made me unique: healing magic! But it looks like I'm not useless anymore as long as I have this!

As I inwardly rejoice and jump for joy, Uno smiles while saying: "Let us name this new special ability Peeping Rista."

"I'd rather not sound like a criminal, thank you very much!! Thanks for ruining the mood!"

"I-I am so sorry. It appears I need to work on my naming skills..."

"A-anyway, I'll come up with a name later. Right now, I'm more interested in knowing why Nina was crying."

"How about using the move once more, then? You might learn why."

I nod, then hold on to the pressed flower and close my eyes. I link my senses to the item in my hand, just like I do when I use Appraise. Before long, I have another vision of Nina crying. She repeatedly calls out for her father in a dark room while copiously weeping. But...

"...Did you figure anything out, Rista?"

"No... I can clearly see her, but I still don't know why it happened."

I grimace out of frustration, almost ready to quit, but Uno looks into my eyes, deathly serious.

"While rare, there are some humans who possess the ability to read thoughts dwelling in items. However, you are a goddess, Rista. You should be able to go beyond that."

"What do you mean?"

"If you strongly desire to know what happened, you should be able to read the person's feelings emitted from their residual thoughts or even visualize a past experience of theirs."

"I-is that what you meant by 'go beyond'?"

"Yes. I am sure you can do it, Rista. Peep through the windows of their hearts."

I'm starting to feel more like a criminal when she puts it like that, but contrary

to my mixed feelings, Uno clasps her hands before her chest in excitement.

“It is time, Rista! Amplify the goddess powers inside of you!”

“O-okay! I’ll give it a try!”

I focus all my attention on the pressed flower in my hand.

“Mn... Mn...!”

“You need to be more serious about it!”

“Okay... Hi-yaaaaaaa!”

“What do you mean ‘hi-ya’?! You have to wish harder! Even harder! Until you want to vomit blood and—*blaaargh!*”

“E-er...rrraaahhhhhh!!”

I tightly clench the pressed flower, almost completely crushing it. O-oh, no! I’m pushing so hard that I think something’s about to come out of my butt! But I have to do it! You’ve got this, Rista! Figure out why Nina was crying! Ahhhhhh! Shine, my goddess powers! Moon Plasma Power! Boobs Up! In the name of the moon, I’ll peep on youuuuuu!

I continue to fire myself up as if I really were on the verge of vomiting blood when I suddenly realize I can’t hear Uno’s voice anymore. And inside my head, I have a vision different from before. The area is as dim as it was earlier, but standing before me is a massive sable crystal. It’s the magic-sealing stone where Lucifer Crowe was sealed. I can see others surrounding the stone as well: multiple demon priests, Rosalie wearing a robe, Chaos Machina, and...

“Dad... No... Please don’t...”

I can hear Nina’s voice. She’s holding hands with her father as tears stream down both of their faces. But even then, her father courageously says: “Nina, it’s my turn. Someone has to do it.”

Nina falls silent, but Chaos Machina speaks up in her place.

“Yes, Ninaaa. He was selected fairly, so there’s nothing to be done about it. Nothing, nothing, nothiiiiiiing!”

“...Have you finished saying your good-byes?”

Nina's father firmly nods at Rosalie, who then slowly unsheathes her sword.

"I promise I will not let your death be for naught. This shall bring us one step closer to Lucifer Crowe's awakening."

"Exactlyyy. Peace will finally return to the world."

Nina's father crouches before the magic-sealing stone and lowers his head. Rosalie raises her sword high into the air.

"Dad!! Noooooo!!"

Rosalie mercilessly swings her blade as Nina screams. My consciousness returns to reality with the unpleasant sound of a life being cut short.

"...Are you okay, Rista?"

I violently begin to tremble to the point that I don't even reply to Uno's concerned call.

I-I-I have to tell Seiya!

There's an extremely large grassy field not too far from Uno's place, littered with bizarre plants and weeds. I sprint over as quickly as I can, knowing that Seiya and Cerceus are training there. I find Seiya leaning against a nearby tree.

"Ah...! Seiya!"

But in my haste, I nearly trip over some garbage on the ground. It's Cerceus, laid out on his back after training, but I don't have time for him right now.

"Seiya, this is bad! Rosalie is using human sacrifices to resurrect Lucifer Crowe!"

Seiya, however, doesn't even blink.

"And how do you know that?"

"I found out with the help of the new power I got from my Demon Mode! I read Nina's residual thoughts in the pressed flower she gave us!"

Still in my demonic form, I flail my arms and try to explain, but Seiya appears skeptical.

"Are you sure you're not just imagining things?"

“I’m not imagining anything! My Appraise ability improved, so I can now reexperience people’s feelings and past by interacting with their possessions! Uno said so, so it must be true!”

“Hmph. If what you say is true, then I suppose I can start calling you Crystal Ball Woman instead of Herb Woman.”

“I don’t care what you call me!”

Because right now, my top priority is opening a gate to warped Gaeabrande. First, I want to talk to Rosalie and confirm what I saw. Nevertheless, Seiya is still sitting in the shadow while showing no signs of moving.

“Even if your vision did prove that really happened, it’s nothing to be surprised about.”

“What?!”

“When Rosalie was talking to the demons in front of the magic-sealing stone, they mentioned that Lucifer Crowe was already close to awakening, and that they would only need around ‘one hundred more.’ One hundred ‘days’ seemed like a long time, so I suspected they were talking about sacrifices.”

“Y-you knew?! So why didn’t you do anything...?!”

“That version of Gaeabrande is a warped illusion created by Mersais. Even if Lucifer Crowe were to awaken and defeat Mash, everyone would be saved in the end, right? Does it really matter who saves the world as long as it happens?”

“I get that, but...!”

Cerceus glares at me as I talk to Seiya.

“Y’know, being stepped on hurts, Rista! How about an apology?!”

“It’s your fault for leisurely taking a nap in a field like that!”

“I wasn’t taking a nap! I was exhausted from all the training!”

“‘Training...’ Oh yeah! Seiya, have you finished training?”

When I turn around, Seiya is writing something on a piece of straw paper while still sitting under the tree.

“Uh. What are you doing?”

“I’m using my free time wisely. I’m creating a simulation for if the Divine Hero suddenly attacks.”

“O-oh. I guess that is important, but ‘free time’? That means you’re finished training, right?”

As I urge him to hurry, Cerceus suddenly casts a scornful eye at me.

“Why are you in such a hurry? Seiya told you already. That world is an illusion.”

“I don’t care! I just don’t like watching the people I love die! Cerceus, you’re a god, too, right?! Surely, you feel the same way!”

“Hm... Yeah, I don’t really like seeing people die even if they are illusions.”

“Right?! So let’s go! Rosalie’s probably sacrificing more townspeople as we speak!”

I shift my eyes toward Seiya and quietly wait in anticipation for him to say his signature phrase.

“I’m perfectly...”

Seiya pauses, then begins pouring some tea into a cup from the teapot he had with him in the shade.

“What the...?! Why did you stop?! You were about to say you were perfectly prepared, right?!”

“Yes, I’m perfectly...”

But Seiya brings the cup to his lips and takes two sips of tea.

“...prepared.”

“Stop pausing and say the line all the way through! Why are you sipping tea in between words now?!”

Annoyed, I shove Cerceus forward.

“You too, Cerceus! Get ready to go!”

“What? I have to go, too?”

“Of course you do! Seiya, get your—are you still drinking that tea?! Ugh! Get up and let’s goooooo!!”

Although anxious about how Seiya’s acting even more apathetic than usual, I end up prodding them until we eventually return to warped Gaeabrande.

The gate leads to Rosalie’s hideout. Although I’m limited as to where I can connect my gates to in this warped world, I can still freely open a gate to places I’ve been before. The moment we arrive, I begin my search for Rosalie to ask her about the human sacrifices, but when I look around, she’s nowhere in sight.

“Hm? What’s all that about?”

Cerceus mutters. The main road, a slight walk away from the hideout, is bustling with humans and demons as they seem to be gathering and making a fuss.

“There’s only one way to find out!”

Seeing the main street so packed throws me for a loop. I had no idea this many humans and demons lived here. The frigid town of Iglu is now filled with hot air and commotion. After the people eventually move to the side of the road, a horde of stout, armored demons come walking through.

“Demon’s Sword has returned!”

“The triumphant return of our Hero!”

Demons and humans join hands and rejoice. In spite of the fact that most of them are wounded, perhaps from being attacked by the dragonewts, the demon soldiers parade down the street, all smiles. However, when a standout six-armed demon appears, the cheers from the crowd grow even louder.

“Eraser! Eraser has returned!”

“Long live Eraser! Long live Demon’s Sword!”

Taken aback, I poke Seiya’s shoulder.

“H-hey! Isn’t that one of the Demon Lord’s generals...?!”

“Yeah. And it appears he’s regarded as a Hero in this world as well. While he was a general, I remember him being some expendable monster who was

instantly torn to shreds by the emperor, but his stats seem to have improved somewhat.”

Even the vicious demon, who could freely wield an array of weapons with his six arms, warmly responds to the villagers’ applause and praise without hesitation. Cerceus mutters: “Even a terrifying demon like that is living in harmony among the humans.”

“Yeah, it’s a strange feeling... Ugh! There’s no time for this! We have to find Rosalie!”

I start asking the clapping townspeople where Rosalie is until someone tells me that she’s apparently behind the building where the magic-sealing stone is kept. When we head over, we find her praying in front of a row of tombstones.

“Rosalie... So this is where you were...”

She stands up when she hears my voice and slowly turns around.

“Eraser has returned from his expedition victorious, so I came here to inform the spirits of the departed.”

“Is that how you plan to atone? You think that makes this all right?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I know that you’re sacrificing the townspeople to resurrect Lucifer Crowe!”

“...As expected of a goddess, after all. It seems I can’t hide anything from you.”

Rosalie doesn’t seem to be shaken up, despite being called out. In fact, she fixes me with a penetrating glare, causing me to get flustered instead.

“Lucifer Crowe requires a large quantity of mana—our very life force—to resurrect. However, the mana of demons and dragonewts is far weaker than that of humans. It would take a few decades of killing dragonewts to ever even get close to our goal. Therefore, once every few months, we draw lots among the villagers to fairly decide who will become the next sacrifice.”

Rosalie directs her gaze to the dozen or so tombstones. Seeing the complete lack of emotion in her eye sends a chill down my spine.

“D-don’t tell me that these tombs are all...!”

She sacrificed all of these lives for her cause... She’s just like the Great Mother of Dragons! This isn’t the Rosalie I know at all! Could a new environment and position really change a person this much?

“S-Seiya! Say something to her!”

But Seiya is acting like nothing’s wrong, just like Rosalie.

“Does it even matter? This world is just an illusion, after all. If anything, I want to shake her hand.”

Seiya then pats Rosalie on the shoulder. Cerceus copies Seiya as well for some reason and gives Rosalie a thumbs-up with a grin... What is wrong with you two?!

Rosalie gives Seiya a slight nod.

“I appreciate your understanding. We had no choice but to make a few sacrifices for the greater good.”

“‘Greater good,’ my ass! This is wrong! I’m not going to let you kill any more people!”

“We don’t need any more sacrifices. Eraser slew over a hundred dragonewts during his expedition. While that only equates to a few human lives, it should be enough to fully shatter the cracked magic-sealing stone. Lucifer Crowe will awaken once the demon priests finish the mana-infusing ritual.”

“The resurrection of Lucifer Crowe... Are you sure that’s a good idea? Rosalie, what if the demons are just using you?”

“How many times do I have to explain myself? The bond built between humans and demons over the past decade is thicker than blood. Chaos Machina and I have overcome death and defeated the dragonewts together countless times.”

Speak of the devil. Chaos Machina herself suddenly appears and warmly waves at Rosalie.

“Come on, Princess! The ritual is fiiinally about to begin!”

“All right. Let’s go.”

After replying with a cordial smile, Rosalie and Chaos Machina walk off harmoniously together. And as I watch them fade into the distance, I actually do feel a strong bond of trust between them.

When I enter the stone building where the magic-sealing stone sleeps, the soldiers from Demon’s Sword are already there along with Eraser, Flashika, and the higher-ups from the Human-Demon Alliance as well. Standing before the hordes of demons and humans, Rosalie ceremoniously declares: “Today, our long-sought goal of resurrecting Lucifer Crowe is about to come to fruition. However, before we begin the ritual, let us express our gratitude in prayer to Demon’s Sword, who gathered enough mana after killing countless dragonewts for us, and to the humans who have sacrificed themselves to accelerate the resurrection.”

Both humans and demons close their eyes in reverence for a few moments until Rosalie eventually opens her eye.

“Now, let the ritual begin.”

And on her signal, the demon priests surround the magic-sealing stone. They raise their sights and arms to the skies. They appear to be using magic to gather the life forces from the dragonewts Eraser killed, which they will then pour into the stone.

...However, right as the demon priests begin to chant, the door to the building flies open with a thud. Everyone looks over. Standing there is a single demon, covered in wounds. It was a Demon’s Sword soldier who had returned from the expedition.

“Get out. We’re in the middle of the ritual,” Eraser demands with a stern voice.

However, the demon slowly approaches us with unsteady steps. It’s like he didn’t even hear him.

“Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho... Ha-ha...ha...”

Right as the demon soldier eerily chuckles, Seiya sprints forward! He swings his sheathed sword with an upward motion, knocking the demon back to the

entrance!

“S-Seiya?! What’s going on?!”

“Shut up and stand back.”

The demons around us glare at Seiya. Their reactions make sense, though. Their fellow was just attacked without warning. However, Seiya doesn’t take his eyes off the demon for one second. The soldier slowly stands back up and gives a muffled laugh. Then, in the very next moment, his body radiates a blinding light before he immediately explodes with an ear-piercing roar!

“Whooo-yyy?!”

Cerceus screams the loudest. Chaos Machina then shouts:

“D-did that deeemon have explosives strapped to his body? What is the meaning of this, Eraser?! He’s your soldier, riiight?”

“My soldiers would never betray us!”

While they argue back and forth, Rosalie’s eye opens wide as she stares at Seiya.

“How did you know that soldier was a threat?”

G-good point! We would have all been blown to bits if Seiya didn’t notice! But how in the world did he figure it out?

Seiya’s eyes are sharp as he explains:

“No decent person would ever approach someone while saying ‘Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho,’ so I decided to strike first.”

“Huh?! ...O-oh! So that’s how you figured it out!”

Rosalie seems to be astonished, but I don’t blame her! As always, Seiya’s intuition is out of this world! And what kind of person hits someone with a weapon just because their laugh is weird?! Just how unhinged is Seiya?! But, well, his split-second decision did save our lives!

In an attempt to change the mood, Rosalie shouts:

“Increase security at the entrance! No one else gets in! There is no time to waste! Continue the ritual!”

Perhaps something terrifying is happening right now outside the building, but even then, Rosalie prioritizes feeding mana into the magic-sealing stone above all else.

Parasitism and Resurrection

The demon soldier's eccentric behavior and explosion give me a terrible sense of foreboding. I can feel the knot in my stomach. Nevertheless, the demon priests continue the ritual just as Rosalie commanded.

"O myriad lives which once belonged to the dragonewts, come and release our lord from her shackles."

They raise their hands to the ceiling as they chant around the magic-sealing stone. However, it isn't long before their chants come to a halt. Rosalie angrily shouts: "What are you doing?! There is no need to fear! Continue the ritual!"

"I-it's not that! The mana isn't coming!"

"What...? What is the meaning of this, Eraser?!"

Rosalie shoots Eraser a stern glare, but he simply shakes his head.

"Demon's Sword slaughtered over one hundred dragonewts during our last expedition. There is no doubt about that."

Right as Eraser finishes his sentence, vile laughter suddenly reverberates throughout the room.

"You fool! You've never killed a single one!"

When I turn around, I see another soldier from Demon's Sword behind me. He eerily cackles while approaching us just like the one before.

Th-there's still another traitor among us?!

"...You too?"

But this time, Eraser makes the first move instead of Seiya. He closes in on the soldier in the blink of an eye before unhesitatingly chopping his former subordinate's head off with his battle-ax. Both demons and humans gasp as fresh violet blood spews into the air. However...

“Oooooo. How cruel of you,” the demon soldier says as his head soars through the air, spurting out copious amounts of blood.

“Heh. You didn’t even give the poor guy a chance to explain himself.”

How is he still speaking?! I-is he being controlled by someone?!

It was just as I thought. A snakelike creature slithers out of the severed head.

“The dragonewts that you thought you killed were already dead! I simply slipped inside their bodies and moved them around like this!”

“Tch.”

Eraser grunts, then immediately throws his battle-ax. It spins in the air before hitting the snakelike creature and pinning it to the stone pillar behind it. Eraser approaches the pillar.

“Who are you?”

“Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho! I am the Parasite Dragon Paradura!”

Dragon...? This little thing’s a dragonewt?!

The dragonewt Paradura laughs in spite of his crucifixion. His tail squirms about, then immediately another small dragon drops to the floor as if he had just shed his skin. The dragon pinned to the pillar withers away, but the one on the floor cheerfully raises his head.

“I’ve finally made it past the force field! And it’s all thanks to you being so stupid and letting my doppelgängers inside!”

“Hmph!”

Chaos Machina slams her massive sword into the dragonewt slithering on the ground, but even after she flattens his small body, he bursts out in a shrill laugh.

“Hee-hee-hee-ha-ha-ha-ha! The days of both mankind and demonkind are over!”

Paradura’s body suddenly dries out, and before long, he stops moving completely.

I-it looks like he’s dead...

Chaos Machina cocks her head back while staring at the second Paradura.

“Oh, myyy. He implied that this was his doppelgänger, right? I wonder if that means the real Paradura’s somewhere in town?”

“Dammit! Why now...?!”

Rosalie groans. Seiya casts a distant gaze at the demons.

“You should have quarantined them. I would have thoroughly checked each one of the soldiers for outside illnesses and pests the moment they returned.”

Seiya says before snapping his fingers.

“I don’t care what happens to this warped world, but I have to protect myself.”

Seiya’s body is immediately consumed by deep-red flames.

“Who knows where his doppelgängers are hiding? If he can sneak into bodies through their wounds, he might be able to slip inside through the ears or nose as well, so I plan on covering my entire body with fire just in case.”

“O-oh, that makes sense...”

“I want to light you and Cerceus on fire as well, but you may disintegrate, since your fire resistances are so low.”

“...?! Then no, thank you!”

“Yeah! No, thank you!”

“Fine.”

After rummaging through the item pouch, Seiya pulls some things out and hands them to Cerceus.

“Huh?! What are these?”

“Corks. Use these to block any passageway the enemy might try to enter. Your ears, nostrils, and don’t forget your ass.”

“M-My ass, too...?”

Seiya, maintaining his overly serious demeanor, approaches me before handing me even more corks than he gave to Cerceus.

“Rista, you too. I’m talking nostrils, ear cavities, anus...and your crotch.”

“I’d rather die!!”

“I’m just looking out for you.”

“That would legitimately be the worst thing that ever happened to me! It would be even more embarrassing than what happened to me in the underworld, so if it’s all the same to you, I’ll take my chances with death!”

“*Sigh...* Why are women always so worried about embarrassing themselves? If that parasite gets inside of you, it’ll be too late to save you...”

“H-hey, uh... Seiya! I’m a man, but I don’t really wanna use these corks, either!”

Seiya glares at Cerceus and me, but eventually, he lets out a brief sigh and creates an Automatic Phoenix. Both Cerceus and I now have a fiery bird flapping over our heads.

“Self-Immolation would have given you more protection, but this should give you a basic modicum of defense.”

“It’s fine... This is more than enough...”

“Just let me know if you want any corks.”

“How about you shove ’em up *your* ass?!”

A-at least we’re going to be okay now! But that dragonewt made it sound like his doppelgängers have already snuck inside town through other demon soldiers...which means Nina and the other villagers are in danger!

“Rosalie, come on! Let’s go take care of this monster!”

I impatiently urge her on, but Rosalie’s eye is still focused on the magic-sealing stone.

“Wh-what’s wrong?”

“If that dragonewt kills a few more villagers...Lucifer Crowe will finally awaken.”

“Huh?! Are you seriously planning on abandoning the villagers?!”

“Just a little more... Just a little more and...! And our savior will awaken... Mankind will be saved!”

Rosalie mutters like a woman possessed. The demons, surprisingly, are the calm ones. Chaos Machina places a finger on her chin.

“He was likely eavesdropping on our conversation, so he probably won’t kill any huumans if he knows we need a great amount of mana to resurrect Lucifer Crowe. It sounds like he can create copies of himself, so he’s probably going to craawl inside the villagers and control them.”

Rosalie clenches her teeth.

“We just need one... We only need one more sacrifice...!”

Rosalie glares at the high-ranking humans, who immediately avert their gazes. I can’t sit back and watch this anymore.

“Stop this, Rosalie! I won’t let you sacrifice any more people!”

“I hear that the holy sword Igzasion that the Dragon Lord wields was birthed from the sacrifice of the one he loved most! The only way to fight darkness is to surrender yourself to darkness as well!”

“No, it’s not! We were able to save the world without Igzasion!”

“Enough of your lies!”

While I’m arguing with Rosalie, I hear a loud voice yell out from behind: “Tch! Then why don’t you become the sacrifice yourself?!”

The brazen voice was not Seiya’s but Cerceus’s. What the...? Since when did Cerceus get so manly? ...Hold up.

When I look back, my jaw drops. Cerceus, despite being massive, is hunched over and trying to make himself smaller so he can hide behind me. However, Rosalie and the demons end up staring at me instead for some reason.

Wait a second! Hey?! Now it looks like I’m the one who said that! You cowardly meathead! You shouldn’t have said anything at all if you were going to hide!

Eventually, Flashika slowly walks over to Cerceus and me.

“I am sorry, but the princess must not be sacrificed.”

“H-hey, uh... Flashika? That wasn’t me who said that. That was—”

“The princess, the emperor’s own flesh and blood, has a duty to survive on behalf of all mankind.”

“Okay. I get that, but...”

I pause midsentence when I notice something in Flashika’s hand. It’s a dagger. He looks over at Rosalie and brilliantly smiles before touching the blade to his neck.

“Flashika?! No! Don’t...!”

But there isn’t even another second to stop him. Flashika resolutely slices his own throat with the dagger. The sound of flesh being carved into echoes as dark red blood spills out.

“H-hold on! Let me heal you!”

I try to use a healing spell on Flashika as he lies on the ground, but the moment I sit him up...I realize that Flashika’s life has already escaped through the deep wound in his neck.

“No...! This can’t be...!”

Even in death, he wears a satisfied smile. And yet, Rosalie doesn’t even approach Flashika. She yells to the demon priests: “Now, the time has come to resurrect Lucifer Crowe! Finish the ritual!”

Despite having just lost a faithful subject, Rosalie is solely concerned with the resurrection of Lucifer Crowe. It’s as if she herself had turned into a demon after living with them for so long. I shudder.

“Wh-what a heartless monster!” Cerceus says before gulping.

Just like Cerceus, I feel disgusted by her actions, but there’s something else weighing on my mind as well.

Now that I think about it, Seiya’s been awfully quiet, especially after what just happened.

Flashika has departed, and the demon priests are in the process of

resurrecting Lucifer Crowe. That's when I notice that Seiya's squatting over the area where Paradura was killed.

"What are you doing? ...S-S-Seiya?!"

The instant I walk over, something immediately feels off to me. Seiya looks like he shrank. I must just be seeing things! There's no way Seiya, who's over 180 centimeters tall, is smaller than me!

"Seiya?! Is it just me, or did you shrink?!"

"Technically, I've separated myself."

"Huh?!"

I jump...because I hear the same voice talking to me from behind. I swiftly turn around to find another Seiya standing behind me! And he's just as small as the other one! As my lips quiver, the two Seiyas stand side by side before me. Then in the blink of an eye, they become a blur as if I were seeing double, only to have separated once more! Each one of the four Seiyas is shorter than the last two and reach only my waist.

"Wh-wh-wh-wha—?!"

Even Cerceus's jaw drops as he stands by my side. He asks:

"S-Seiya... Did you copy that dragonewts' skill?!"

"I used Mimic to memorize it a moment ago. While I'm limited to three minutes each time I use Mimic, I can maintain this without using the move until then."

"I still can't believe you can Mimic such a move..."

"It appears that while I can Mimic it, I can't turn into a small dragon like him. But I can Mimic the skill to divide myself. It's quite interesting."

"But Seiya, I thought that Mimic used a lot of MP."

"I managed to reduce the MP consumption by one-fifth thanks to my training. That still doesn't change the fact that it consumes a colossal amount of MP, though. If I could, I'd like to return to the underworld and perfect my magic, but..."

Seiya glances at me, but I'm already on the verge of exploding.

"You think you can just learn this 'divide' skill, then go home?! You've got to be kidding me! More importantly, is that even something you should be doing at a time like this?!"

After I shout, the four Seiyas regroup and fuse into one.

"Seiya, did you not see what just happened?! Flashika's dead!"

"...And?"

"What do you mean 'and'?!"

I can no longer suppress the feelings welling up in the pit of my stomach.

"I-I can't just draw a line between the two worlds like you again! For the people living here right now, this is reality! If I get injured, it hurts. If someone dies, it's sad."

"What's the point in saving an illusion?"

"I don't care if it's all an illusion! If there are people to save, I want to save them! Don't you?"

"It doesn't make any sense to."

While Seiya and I argue, Cerceus taps me on the shoulder.

"P-psst. Rista... Look."

"What do you want?!"

I scream out of frustration, but when I look in the direction Cerceus is pointing, I fall speechless. A massive crack is crawling up the magic-sealing stone that the demon priests are surrounding. It's far deeper and more profound than the first fissure, and I can hear the stone crackling even now as the slits spread across it like a spiderweb.

"It's going to crack open! The magic-sealing stone is going to break!"

The instant somebody mutters those words, I hear a loud shattering noise and the crystalline stone crumbles into dust! Immediately, an overpowering ominous aura fills the room. And then...

“I-is that...Lucifer Crowe?!”

At first glance, she looks like a winged goddess. She has a penetrating gaze but beautiful features and milky-white skin. However, the majority of her body is covered in feathers like a bird, and she has talons attached to her delicate legs. I uncontrollably tremble before the sinister, powerful aura emitting from the birdlike demon’s body. The demons in the room begin to kneel before her as if they had sensed her overwhelming magic power as well. Anyway, I can’t help but wonder what her stats are like, so I use Scan.

Lucifer Crowe

Lv: 99

(MAX)

HP: 1152047 MP: 254528

ATK: 899777 DEF: 750121 SPD: 919876 MAG: 185411 GRW: 999 (MAX)

Resistance: Fire, Water, Wind, Lightning, Ice, Earth, Dark, Poison, Paralysis, Curse, Instant Death, Sleep, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Magic Bow (LV: MAX), Attack Evasion (LV: MAX), Flight (LV: MAX)

Skills: Thunderwind Rush, Master Wind Arrow, Diablos Rain

Personality: Merciless

Wh-what stats! They really are on par with a Demon Lord’s!

Judging by the oohing and aahing, it seems that Chaos Machina, Eraser, and the others have used Scan as well.

“Marvelous, marvelous, maaarvelous. What marvelous stats! They are far higher than even the former Demon Lord Xenosload’s!”

“The mana she’s absorbing must have increased her magic powers even more.”

Seiya frowns as he listens to their conversation.

“What the hell...?”

“Y-you’re feeling a little uneasy, too, huh, Seiya?! Was resurrecting her really the right thing to do?”

“No, not that... I had no idea the former Demon Lord’s name was Xenosload. I better write that down before I forget.”

“...?! Who cares about that right now?!”

I didn’t know, either, but...anyway...Seiya sure looks calm. Did he see her stats?! He’s acting way too laidback, even more so than usual! As I sink to the depths of despair, Lucifer Crowe slowly walks toward us. Rosalie yells: “Lucifer Crowe! We thank you for awakening from your deep slumber! Please save us—both demonkind and mankind—from the dragonewts!”

But she passes right by Rosalie, ignoring her, and approaches Eraser and Chaos Machina. Chaos Machina holds out her hand while Eraser reverently bows his head.

“Now that Xenosload is dead, we demons swear our allegiance to our new Lord, Lucifer Crowe.”

“...I see. Xenosload is no more.”

Her voice is cold yet possesses an empress’s dignity. Eraser waits on her while answering: “Xenosload was killed by the dragonewts while you were sealed away.”

“Oh? He lost to mere lizards?”

“Gaeabrande is currently under the rule of the wielder of the holy sword Igzasion, Dragon Lord Mash Dragonight, and his dragonewts. Even now, they have infiltrated our base...”

Eraser explains to Lucifer Crowe how Paradura snuck inside the barrier until she eventually glares at the building’s entrance with a distant gaze.

“I wish to know more about this world, but...we can finish this conversation after I dispose of that dragonewt.”

“Ohhh!!”

The demons let out excited shouts when they hear those words. Walking with an air of regality, Lucifer Crowe opens the door and marches outside with the demons in tow. Rosalie and the other humans soon follow behind.

Sh-she's so confident and courageous! She's way more heroic than Seiya!

"Come on, Seiya! Let's go! We can't let the demons show us up like that!"

"I don't mind going to watch, but I'm not going to fight. I plan on watching Lucifer Crowe's battle from a safe distance while hiding."

"What kind of Hero does that?! Whatever! Let's just go!"

"All right, but before we go, I have to ask just one last time... Are you sure you don't want a cork?"

"Yes, dammit!"

I then grab the motivationally challenged Hero by the hand and drag him out the door.

The Magic Bow of Darkness

Lucifer majestically parades around the town along with Eraser, Chaos Machina, and the other demons. I follow them for a while until I hear a woman shriek. But right as I'm about to rush in to help, a few demons frantically race over to Eraser.

"Eraser! The Demon Sword's soldiers have gone berserk! They're destroying the city!"

"Their bodies have been taken over by a dragonewt. Don't hold back just because they're my men. Kill them before there are any more victims."

"Yes, sir!"

Even while Eraser is giving orders, the town erupts into chaos. I feel like I'm watching a riot. Some people are running about trying to escape, and some demons are frozen in panic. The only thing everyone has in common is...the fact that at least one demon soldier, who is clearly acting unnatural, is chasing after them. There are five...six—no...! There are way too many of them! H-how can that dragonewt be controlling this many demon soldiers?! When did he sneak inside them?!

"Eraser has given orders to kill the out-of-control soldiers!"

The demon who had just received orders shouts to the others who had been running about in confusion, and their expressions change in an instant. One demon slashes a Demon's Sword soldier with his razor-sharp claws. The soldier's flesh is torn open, and copious amounts of blood spill out. It's a fatal cut from the shoulder to the waist. Nevertheless, at that very instant, a tiny dragonewt lunges out from the soldier's wound and swiftly crawls up the attacker's body before slipping into his pointed ear!

"Gwaaaaaah!"

He screams and collapses to the ground, writhing in pain before slowly standing back up. He then curls his lips into a smirk as if the agony he had just experienced was no more than a lie.

“Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho... May the Seraph bless us all!”

H-has he been infected?! This must be how Paradura’s been slowly increasing in number!

“Seiya! We have to find Paradura’s original body!”

“No, we don’t.”

“S-Seiya?! We’re never going to be able to defeat the Dragon Lord if we die here! Do you seriously not understand that?”

“You’re the one who doesn’t understand. We don’t need to look for his original body because each tiny parasitic dragon is a part of his original body. I presume there are already dozens, if not hundreds, of them. Just killing a few of them isn’t going to do much damage to him.”

O-oh...! Seiya must have Mimicked his move, which is why he knows exactly how it works... Wait.

“Hold on! Do you mean that over a hundred demons are already infected?!”

“That’s what I would do if I were him.”

“But...!”

The mob of infected demons raise hell throughout the town until they eventually notice the horde of demons surrounding Lucifer Crowe and approach them.

“R-Rista! They’re coming this way!”

Cerceus and I naturally retreat as the ominous demons begin to stagger toward us while wildly cackling. That is, until Chaos Machina stands before them. She effortlessly swings her sword, which is almost as big as her entire body, and cleanly splits the first demon soldier in half. Immediately, the small dragonewt shoots out of its wound and heads straight for her mouth!

“Watch out!”

I scream reflexively...but it appears I was worried for nothing. Moments before the tiny dragonewt crawls into her mouth, Chaos Machina tightly bites down on its neck with her sharp fangs, then spits out the head with a sour face.

“Disgusting. So, so, sooo disgusting.”

Chaos Machina seems confident, but the infected demon soldiers continue to march toward her as if they weren’t concerned in the least.

“May the Seraph bless us all! May the Seraph bless us all!”

Chaos Machina scratches her cheek, looking troubled.

“Hm... Fighting this many at once could get trickyyy.”

She slightly takes a step back. Eraser braces himself for battle as well, but the infected demons suddenly stop in their tracks in unison. A single demon soldier then says:

“Heh-heh-heh... I sense someone with an extremely strong magic power among you.”

I turn to Seiya, who looks extremely powerful with his flames cloaking his body for protection.

He must be getting cold feet after laying eyes on Seiya’s fire! He wouldn’t want his original body to be burned to a crisp, after all!

“Heh! Seiya’s gonna make mincemeat out of you!”

But the demon stares in the complete opposite direction of us while ignoring me in the process. Inside the demon soldier’s body, Paradura wasn’t looking at Seiya but at Lucifer Crowe... Seriously?!

“Hyah-ha-ha-ha! I see. So that’s your savior! No wonder you’ve been hiding behind this barrier for so long! What an oppressive aura!”

After the dragonewt shouts in admiration, he lets out a vile laugh.

“But it doesn’t matter how strong you are! My doppelgängers have already found their way inside the majority of the demons in this village!”

It sounds like Seiya was right with his prediction: The dragonewt has already infected a few hundred demons. Nevertheless, Eraser calmly says:

“And? I feel bad for my brethren, but all we have to do is kill you along with them.”

“Heh-heh! A very clear-cut, demon-like solution, I must say! But will you be so calm once you find out you’re one of the unlucky ones?”

“What?”

There’s an immediate change in Eraser. He groans in agony as one of his six hands clutches his stomach. And then...

“Gwah!”

After Eraser’s stomach tears open, a tiny dragonewt pokes its bloody head out, and lolls its red tongue with a smile.

“You idiot! I already snuck inside your body as well!”

“H-how did you get in?!”

“Hyah-ha-ha-ha! Now do as I say, or die!”

I-it looks like an alien! Did he sneak inside Eraser during his expedition? Or did he wait until he had his guard down? I don’t know, but this is terrifying! Maybe I should ask Seiya for a cork!

I begin weighing my pride against having a cork shoved up my nether regions when Paradura’s doppelgänger slips back inside Eraser’s stomach. His face twists in anguish as he addresses his men.

“Don’t hold back...! Kill...me...!”

But at that moment, Eraser’s expression changes, and he begins speaking with a high-pitched voice as the words fall off his twisted lips.

“Oh, how special this turned out to be! Then let’s see one of you give it a try! Kill me and your general! Just remember this, though: Killing one or two of my doppelgängers would hardly affect me. If you want to defeat me, you have to kill every last one of my doppelgängers in the city! Heh-heh-heh-ho-ho-ho! Too bad that’s impossible!!”

I swallow my breath.

Mn...! He’s not only taking over the town, but taking the demons as hostage

as well! I never expected someone this small to be so powerful! How are we going to get out of this one?!

“Now remove the barrier around the city!”

Paradura threatens the others from within Eraser’s stomach. Chaos Machina clicks her tongue, and Rosalie’s breathing grows harsh. I am curious to know Seiya’s reaction and turn around...but I don’t see him anywhere.

“What the...?!”

I restlessly look around for Seiya. A few moments go by until I finally see half of his burning face along with Cerceus’s peeking out from the shadow of someone’s house a few meters away. I immediately sprint over in a fluster and yell:

“What the hell are you two doing over here?!”

“Hiding, of course. While I may be perfectly protecting myself with these flames, I still want to avoid the small chance I get a parasite like Eraser.”

“An ant wouldn’t even be able to get near you with that much fire! Come on, stop hiding! You have to do something!”

“I actually don’t. More importantly, let’s see if this demon was worth the decade-long wait for the Human-Demon Alliance.”

“...?”

I look in the direction Seiya gestured and gasp. Lucifer Crowe, who was quiet up until now, is glaring at Paradura. After she takes a step forward, she says in a voice as cold as ice:

“How pitiful. When did Gaeabrande become a world populated by weaklings?”

“What did you just say to me? ‘Weaklings’? Me? Heh-heh-heh-ho-ho-ho! Can you not see that you’re at my mercy? You fool! Whether you demons live or die is up to this ‘weakling’!”

“That is nothing more than an illusion. No one is at your mercy.”

Lucifer Crowe slowly moves her arms like she’s pulling a bowstring. Even

though she doesn't have a physical weapon, a black mist appears around her hands as it materializes into a magic bow and arrow.

A pitch-black bow...! That's Lucifer Crowe's special move!

After elegantly drawing the string back while bearing a close resemblance to Mitis, the Goddess of Archery, she shoots the arrow not at Paradura but the sky.

"D-does she even know how to use that thing?" Cerceus jeers.

The single slender arrow soars high into the sky, piercing the heavens. The infected demons all watch the arrow while cackling, but I'm more focused on what emerges from the clouds.

"What is that...?!"

An enormous black sphere appears in the sky with countless "eyes" twitching on its surface!

"Rista! What is that monster?! Did she summon that? Wasn't Lucifer's special move supposed to be a magic bow?!"

"I-I don't know what that is!"

"...That must be it."

Seiya's utterance leaves me speechless.

Th-that monster is a Magic Bow?!

That's nothing like the Magic Bow skill that Seiya once learned! As Cerceus and I gawk at the utterly bizarre sphere, Lucifer murmurs:

"Remove yourself from my brethren's bodies."

She then crosses her arms.

"O Seeds of Disaster, fall upon my enemy: Diablos Rain."

Light immediately bursts from the monster in the sky. I manage to see it split into countless trails of darkness, raining upon the demons on the surface at incredible speed like guided missiles.

"Khaaa!"

Eraser grunts as a black ray runs right through his body. It isn't just Eraser, though. The demons in the city rapidly drop to their feet as countless trails of darkness fall upon them. However, the trails never once fall near Rosalie or Chaos Machina. Of course, Seiya, Cerceus, and I are safe as well. That's when it hits me, and I yell to Seiya:

"Is she only sniping the demons who have been infected?! But how?!"

"That round monster must have scanned every demon's body in town. Then, she decided to take them all out at once with Magic Bow."

"S-so she's only killing the demons that have been infected?!"

"No..."

When I follow Seiya's gaze, Eraser is on the ground, moaning in agony and throwing up Paradura's bisected body. He's coughing, but he's miraculously still alive. The other demons gradually begin to get up as well.

"B-but how?! The black light pierced their bodies! How are they still alive?!"

"Those magic arrows must be made with dark magic, which demons are resistant to. That would explain why Eraser and the others aren't dead."

Seiya explains from the shadows as Lucifer Crowe coldly looks down at the tiny dragonewt crawling on the ground and on the verge of death.

"With my Magic Bow, I have simultaneously disposed of all one hundred and eighty-one dragonewts which infected my kin."

"Y-you were able...to hit every one...of my doppelgängers...at the same time...Th-that's...!"

Paradura withers until he can no longer move. And then...there is only silence. Both humans and demons remain silent for a few moments until, all of a sudden, Chaos Machina speaks up in a voice trembling with excitement.

"Wh-what a miracle! A miracle! How wonderful, wonderful—ah, how woonderful!"

Every other demon in town then lets out a cheer as if that were the signal. They gather around Lucifer and begin showering her with praise. Unlike the excited crowd of demons, however, I am trembling deep down inside.

Th-the situation seemed hopeless, and yet she destroyed the enemy like he was nothing! Who knows what else this monster is capable of?!

Before I even realize it, Seiya has left the shadows and is walking ahead. It looks like he deactivated the spell that protected his body with flames as well. He approaches the group of demons who are surrounding Lucifer with cheers, then gives her an almost sarcastic applause.

“Good job. Very impressive work.”

“How arrogant can you be?!”

“Just as I expected, you should be able to put up a good fight against the Dragon Lord. From now on, I will be supporting Lucifer one hundred percent from behind the scenes.”

“A-are you being serious?!”

“Warped Gaeabrande will surely be saved now.”

I-I can't believe what I'm hearing! Supporting Lucifer from behind the scenes?! That's something a random background character does, not the Hero! But as I sigh with grief, Rosalie, standing behind me, mutters:

“Yes. That's perfect. Mankind simply needs to support Lucifer. This legendary demon can surely defeat the Dragon Lord!”

Her cheeks flushed, Rosalie passes through the crowd of demons, then extends an arm to shake Lucifer's hand.

“Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Rosalie Roseguard of the Human-Demon Alliance, and I speak on behalf of all mankind.”

Lucifer doesn't even attempt to shake hands. She simply glares at Rosalie. Nevertheless, Rosalie expresses no concern as she boldly requests:

“Lucifer Crowe! Please save mankind from the Dragon Lord's reign!”

Lucifer's suddenly knits her brows. Then, she asks not Rosalie but the demons around her:

“I was wondering about these humans. They don't seem to be slaves...so why are demons tolerating their existence?”

“Humans and demons have joined forces to defeat the dragonewts.”

Rosalie then pulls out the Testament and shows her, but Lucifer’s cold expression doesn’t change. Rosalie faintly smiles at her.

“I understand how confusing this may seem. You have no idea of our history together this past decade, after all.”

Eraser then steps in between Rosalie and Lucifer.

“Rosalie, let me explain the situation to her.”

“All right. Thanks.”

Eraser reverently explains:

“Over ten years ago, the Dragon Lord defeated the Demon Lord Xenosload. After that, a three-way war broke out between the dragonewts, demons, and humans. During the war, we demons were able to increase our power tenfold by utilizing Deathmagla’s black magic and Kilkapul’s summons. However, the humans were able to enhance their capabilities as well.”

Eraser points at Rosalie while speaking.

“The nation of Roseguard also came up with a method to transfer demonic power into human subjects. From then on, Rosalie Roseguard, the late mage Flashika, and numerous other humans gained extraordinary power. However, as the humans and demons continued to fight, the dragonewts only grew more powerful. Therefore, we made a pact to work together in order to defeat our common enemy.”

Rosalie nods firmly. Eraser then takes the paper from her hand and says:

“This... This is the Testament—the false pact we made to fool the humans until your resurrection, O Lucifer.”

A Decade-Long Bond

Rosalie's face blanches as she glares at Eraser.

"Fool the humans'? Explain yourself! Humans and demons are equals!"

"Humans and demons were never equal. From time immemorial, humans have been little more than parasites."

Eraser's attitude is completely different from a few moments ago as a tense air falls over the area. Cerceus pokes me in the shoulder.

"H-hey, is it just me, or are things not looking so good?"

"I knew it! The demons were just deceiving them!"

Her voice trembling with rage, Rosalie shouts:

"Eraser, do not test my patience. Surely, you haven't forgotten how powerful humans have become after we gained power from you demons!"

After unleashing her demon arm, Rosalie pierces the ground with her unsheathed sword, shattering bedrock with unbelievable strength. But even then, Eraser remains calm.

"That power was a threat to demons in the past, and only the dragonewts benefited from our prolonged battle. Therefore, we decided to use you until the time was right. And now that Lucifer has been awakened, we simply have no use for you anymore."

Eraser throws down the Testament while firmly staring at Rosalie with his crimson eyes.

"Our pact is over. Every human in this town must die."

The ominous threat creates a stir among the high-ranking humans surrounding Rosalie.

“Remain calm!”

Rosalie shouts before picking up the Testament.

“It doesn’t matter what you think. Demons cannot harm us humans as long as we have the Testament!”

There was no doubting that the pact was infused with a tremendous magical power. Not even Seiya in Berserk Mode could tear it. In other words, there is also no way to change what is written on it, either.

S-so why is Eraser so relaxed?

Rosalie points her unsheathed blade at Eraser and glares at him.

“The pact states that ‘Demons shall not harm humans.’ However, there is nothing stopping *us* from hurting *you*. We could wipe out the entire demon population if we wanted to.”

Rosalie is now the one threatening Eraser. And yet Eraser’s expression still doesn’t change.

“You are absolutely correct. Demons cannot hurt humans, nor can we destroy that pact. Just as it states, there is only one person who can destroy it: Rosalie Roseguard.”

Eraser’s lips maliciously curl.

“That’s right... We won’t be the ones who break the bond. You will.”

“What are y—”

Rosalie suddenly pauses midsentence, and her demon hand faintly trembles while holding the Testament.

“M-my arm...!”

Rosalie appears to be fighting against her own arm as if it were trying to move on its own, but it’s no use. A horrible sound reverberates as she easily tears the pact, unlike Seiya, who couldn’t even leave a wrinkle. Rosalie looks at the Testament, which she herself destroyed, in astonishment. Eraser laughs through his nose.

“We came up with a way to control humans who have gained the demonic

powers. Flashika probably could have prevented this with a spell if he were still alive, though.”

After witnessing the end of the Testament, the high-ranking humans surrounding Rosalie say with a frightened voice: “Th-this can’t be happening!”

“Wh-what is going to become of us now?”

Meanwhile, the Demon’s Sword soldiers and demons in the town, who had been watching, wear sinister grins, and I suddenly sense bloodlust wash over the town.

Ugh! I knew they never should have been trusted! Demons are on another level from humans when it comes to being underhanded!

The demons are crafty. They were already thinking about how they would rid themselves of the pact when they made it, and they hid their ill intentions for a decade as they continued to deceive the humans.

The Testament was one of the only two things Rosalie had to rely on, so after losing that, she staggers over to Chaos Machina.

“Chaos Machina...! Don’t tell me you plan on betraying me, too!”

Chaos Machina averts her eyes and remains quiet. Rosalie then shouts: “We’ve gone on countless missions together, fighting dragonewts side by side! You’ve even saved my life before! Were all these years we spent together... nothing more than a lie?”

“Princess...”

I watch Chaos Machina look back at Rosalie and I gasp. She is now wearing the same ghoulish smile she showed to Seiya and me long ago.

“Demons have a looong life-span, didn’t you know? While ten years may have felt like a long time to you, it went by in the blink of an eye for me. And you know whaaat? Of course we’d lie and betray youuu.”

Chaos Machina then raises her voice with an enraptured smile:

“We’re demons, after aaaall!”

“Chaos Machina...!!”

Clenching her teeth, Rosalie swings her blade at Chaos Machina. However...

“Release.”

Chaos Machina’s aura instantly grows stronger. She doesn’t even use her treasured claymore to deflect the strike. Instead, she simply knocks Rosalie’s blade to the side with her arm, causing Rosalie to cut through the air.

“What...?!”

Rosalie is taken aback, but before she can even process what happened, Chaos Machina’s leg sweeps her onto her rear. After treating her attacks as if they came from a small child, Chaos Machina sits on top of Rosalie.

“Sorryyy. I’m actually way stronger than you. I want you to remember something: Those who are truly strong neeeever reveal their full power until the very end.”

Rosalie struggles, but Chaos Machina grabs her by the nape of her neck and pushes her into the ground. She then brings her face closer to Rosalie’s and licks her cheek with her long tongue.

“Hee-hee. Still, our years together haven’t been entiirely unpleasant. I suppose I could simply strip you naked, put a collar on you, and make you my plaything for those looong, lonely nights.”

Rosalie tightly clenches her teeth as her face turns bright red with rage and humiliation. Before long, however, she looks away from Chaos Machina as if she realizes that resistance is futile.

I suddenly hear Cerceus gulp from my side as we watch.

“Chaos Machina...! What a wicked demon! ...A perverse, lewd demon! Her ‘plaything’ for when she gets lonely? *Hff... Hff... Hff...* I’m getting worked up just thinking about it...!”

“What the hell?! Here I am, thinking you’re going to say something meaningful for once, and *that’s* what comes out of your mouth?!”

Even after Chaos Machina stands back up, the surrounding demons continue to mock Rosalie on the ground.

“Hyah-ha-ha! Chaos Machina would never trust a human like you!”

“What an idiot! She even prepared the human sacrifices for us just because we asked!”

“Now, now, nooow. We should feel grateful to the princess. Lucifer Crowe would have never awakened without her.”

Chaos Machina then gazes at Lucifer Crowe with rapture.

“Behold the extraordinary stats that surpass even those of the Demon Lord Xenosload! No longer need we fear the Dragon Lord! From this day forth, the demons shall rule the woorld!”

As the demons’ cheers echo, the high-ranking humans surrounding Rosalie and the townspeople all start to run. The sudden betrayal of the demons turns the town into ruins. However, in the midst of the chaos...

“Automatic Phoenix.”

Seiya calmly chants. Immediately, several fiery birds soar from Seiya’s back into the sky.

He was acting like an NPC for a while there, but it looks like he’s finally ready to do something! I knew it! He always comes through when the chips are down! I take back all of the nasty things I thought about him. He really is a Hero!

However, Seiya’s Automatic Phoenixes don’t head for Eraser or Lucifer, but instead fly off in the complete opposite direction.

“What the...?! Where are your Phoenixes going?!”

“I suddenly became concerned that Lucifer might have missed one of Paradura’s doppelgängers, so I sent the Automatic Phoenix out to patrol the town.”

“You waited until now to do that?! Way to confuse me! You’re not going to defeat the demons?!”

“Forget about them. Besides, anyone could have predicted that the demons would betray the humans. It doesn’t affect the plan at all. I’m happy as long as Lucifer defeats the Dragon Lord for me.”

“How can you still say that?! You can’t count on them!”

But as I'm about to point at Lucifer, I gasp...because she's looking right this way!

"Chaos Machina, who is that human over there? His stats are even greater than that woman who you dealt with earlier. I can sense a dreadful divine aura coming from the man and woman next to him as well."

O-oh, no! She's talking about Cerceus and me, isn't she?!

My heart races as Chaos Machina smiles while saying:

"That's apparently the Hero, his Goddess, and another god. There is nooo need to worry about them, though. They are nothing more than relics of the past, after all. They pose no threat to you, Lucifer."

"Wh-who are you calling relics?!"

"Oh, myyy... It's not my fault that the Hero's stats are but a fraction of Lucifer's. Besides...I've prepared a little something for you all, anyway."

The demon standing behind Chaos Machina hands her a narrow sword. An ominous aura slowly emits from the blade as she unsheathes it.

"Chain Destruction. I don't need to explain what it does, riiight?"

I shudder. Cerceus, in a trembling voice, then says:

"Th-this isn't good! She's going to kill us!"

Flap. Flap. Flap.

All of a sudden, I hear the rustling of feathers coming from behind, so I look back and notice that Seiya is sending out almost double the amount of Automatic Phoenixes compared to earlier!

Seiya's finally going to do something!

But the fiery birds head straight for town, once again ignoring the demons.

"I deployed fifty more to make certain that the dragonewt is dead."

"You're still on that?! And how many of those are you going to send?! What are you doing, cormorant fishing?!"

"Oh, myyy. Even after recognizing the situation he's in, he's still acting like

that. What a bizarre Herooo he is.”

Chaos Machina appears completely taken aback by Seiya’s behavior.

“I have no interest in fighting you. If anything, I want to help.”

“Ohhh?”

After I roll my eyes at the Hero who has no will to fight, Cerceus whispers into my ear: “H-hey, Rista. Do you think maybe Seiya doesn’t believe he can beat Lucifer?”

“What?! You know how strong Seiya is! It doesn’t matter how much lower his stats are. If he turns into a berserker, even Lucifer would—”

“Even if their stats were the same, what would he do about her Magic Bow?”

“Th-that’s, uh...!”

Cerceus actually makes a good point for once, and I fall silent.

I-is he right, Seiya?! Are you trying to suck up to Lucifer because you don’t think you can win against her?!

All of a sudden, Cerceus clenches his fist.

“...Let me handle this.”

“C-Cerceus?! There’s no way you can defeat someone that even Seiya can’t! They’re using Chain Destruction, you know!”

But that’s when I suddenly notice demon horns growing from Cerceus’s head.

“Did you use Demon Mode?! But Uno said not to use it outside of the underworld!”

“I only unleashed a small percentage of my power. It shouldn’t be a problem.”

D-does he really plan on fighting them?! Is he finally taking pride in his title being the Divine Blade?!

However, my newfound respect for Cerceus is short-lived. After approaching the group of demons, Cerceus puts on an exaggerated smile.

“Look at these horns! I’m actually a demon, too! Lady Chaos Machina, I beg you! Please use me as your plaything in the bedroom, as well!”

“Did he seriously just volunteer to be her plaything?! Get back here, you degenerate filth!!”

But after yelling at Cerceus, a certain someone reminds me that he’s not the only useless man around.

“No signs of the dragonewt. I’m impressed. Lucifer Crowe seems to have killed every last one of Paradura’s doppelgängers.”

“This is no time to be impressed! Lucifer is the enemy of mankind!”

“Again, not my problem.”

Seiya then approaches the horde of demons surrounding Lucifer as well until Chaos Machina stands in his way.

“I told you already. I have no interest in fighting you, so how about we work together to defeat the Dragon Lord?”

“The Herooo helping a demon? Surely you jest. You must be trying to deceive us. But you can’t fool a demon.”

Eraser walks over and glares at Seiya as well.

“Hero, that would mean leaving the humans here to die. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure. I really don’t care.”

Both Eraser and Chaos Machina are clearly astonished by Seiya’s immediate reply. I’m surprised, too, of course, and I yell: “Seiya?! No! You have to care!”

But Seiya suddenly tilts his head to the side, coming to some sort of realization.

“Hold on. You said the humans ‘here.’ That doesn’t include me, correct?”

“Heh-heh-heh. The Hero is a human, yes? Of course that includes you.”

As Eraser laughs, Cerceus’s face turns pale.

“I-I don’t count, right? I’m one of you, right?”

“Sorryyy, but you’re no good, either. Your demon and god auras are equally pathetic. Besides, I don’t trust you just like I don’t trust that Herooo.”

“B-but...!”

Cerceus immediately tiptoes back to his spot next to me.

“Tch! I was planning on waiting for them to let their guards down so I could slaughter every last one of them! Shucks.”

“I wish I could slaughter you!”

Seiya is still standing near Chaos Machina, almost like he’s reviewing his bargaining chips.

“It would greatly inconvenience me if you attacked me.”

“Ha-ha-ha! It would ‘inconvenience’ you? Was that a sad attempt at begging for your life? What a pathetic, pathetic, pathetic Heeero.”

“Could you please just kill all the humans except for me?”

“Oh my gosh! He really is begging for his life! Seiya, knock it off!!”

I’m so embarrassed and so upset that I can’t help but scream at him. Yet Seiya still tries to bargain with Lucifer.

“Let’s talk this over rationally. I don’t care how many humans you kill, and I plan on supporting you from the shadows in your quest to defeat the Dragon Lord. I don’t mind killing a few humans in this town to prove that.”

Wh-wh-what scum! I don’t care if this is a warped world! How could he say such a thing?!

I find myself dumbfounded by Seiya genuinely attempting to endear himself to Lucifer, so I look away and notice Rosalie muttering to herself.

“What... What have I done...? All these years...”

Tears gather in her good eye before rolling down her cheek and hitting the ground.

Rosalie...!

From the bottom of my heart, I despised Rosalie for abandoning her loyal retainer Flashika and letting him sacrifice himself for Lucifer’s revival. But her expression has finally returned to one that I remember. It’s like she’s become the reckless, honest Rosalie that I once knew.

“I’m such a fool. I was a pawn for the demons and sacrificed my own people for them. Even Flashika...”

She’s biting her lip in regret. I’m having trouble finding the words to comfort her, but I don’t have time to think, because she suddenly turns her sword on herself!

“R-Rosalie?!”

She unhesitatingly brings her sword toward her throat just like Flashika did. I rush to try and stop her, but someone manages to grab her arm before I do.

“Please don’t, Rosalie!”

Most of the townspeople have been running away ever since the demons showed their true colors. And yet...

“Nina?!”

Still holding on to Rosalie’s arm, Nina looks her right in the eye.

“Why did you stop me? I’m the one who sacrificed your father for this.”

“My father trusted you. He told me that you were a kind person deep down—one who only hardened her heart to save mankind.”

“No... I...”

Nina doesn’t let go of Rosalie’s arm, but she gently smiles at her.

“The day my father died, I went home and found a note he left me. It said, ‘By no means should you resent Princess Rosalie for my fate.’”

A river of tears flows down Rosalie’s cheek.

“Forgive me...! Forgive...me...!”

Ngh...! I feel like I’m going to start crying soon!

I wipe the tears from my eyes as I watch their embrace. In spite of how serious things are over here, I look back to Seiya to find him still trying to persuade Lucifer.

“I’m going to ask you one more time. Could you please just kill the humans from this town?”

“Just how long do you plan on begging?! You’re talking in circles now!”

I find myself enraged by how spineless the Hero is being. Lucifer is also glaring at Seiya the same way someone would look at trash.

“Do you really wish to live that badly? It appears you are a Hero in title only. Nothing more than an insignificant worm.”

“I’m fine with being a worm if you defeat the Dragon Lord for me.”

Lucifer harshly replies:

“Do you still not get it after seeing what just happened? Demons and humans shall never cooperate again. You inferior vermin shall perish long before we slaughter the dragonewts.”

Chaos Machina suddenly chimes in:

“Sooo...? Should I kill all of them? Or should we keep a few as beasts of burden?”

“Simply being near humans makes me sick. I see no reason to leave any alive.”

“But...”

Lucifer and Chaos Machina discuss how best to proceed, but it’s little more than a conversation of what to do with the humans. The only two options are fear and despair. There is no future for mankind either way. But before I even realize it, Rosalie has regained her knightly demeanor.

“Nina, now’s your chance. Run. Get out of here.”

“What about you, Princess Rosalie?”

“Don’t worry about me. I will protect you no matter what.”

Meanwhile, Seiya deeply sighs while walking back over with clear discontent.

“*Sigh...* It just had to be this way, huh?”

He begins rolling his neck and shaking his hands as if he’s getting ready to work out.

“Wh-what are you up to this time?”

“Having the demons defeat our enemy for us would have been the safest and

best possible outcome, but I guess things are never that easy. It looks like there isn't any other option."

"Wait...! Do you mean...?"

"I'm going to fight Lucifer Crowe."

"R-really?! You're finally ready to be a Hero, huh? But...are you going to be okay? Her stats are on par with a Demon Lord's, and that's without her Magic Bow. You saw how she was able to strike multiple targets at once, right?"

"I don't need you to tell me that. I already checked her stats. They were similar to Ixphoria's Grandleon."

"Oh... You already Scanned her..."

"It doesn't matter if this is a warped world or not. I'm always exercising extreme caution to protect myself. Fighting Lucifer is merely a natural consequence of failing to persuade her."

Rosalie glances up at Seiya as if she overheard our conversation.

"You three need to get out of here. Run. There is no point in trying to defeat them. There is no human that can defeat Lucifer Crowe. She is a legendary monster that surpasses even the former Demon Lord."

"Shut up, Worn-Out Rosalie. You just think about how you're going to rebuild this town once the battle is over."

"H-hey!"

Seiya begins marching toward Lucifer, leaving Rosalie behind and ignoring her pleas.

Last Chance

As Seiya approaches Lucifer Crowe, Chaos Machina suddenly stands before him and gets into a fighting stance with her claymore.

“Nowww you want to fight? After all that begging for your life? You’re not even worth Lucifer’s time. I’ll take care of youuu.”

But Lucifer places a hand on Chaos Machina and pulls her back.

“Do not underestimate this human. He is using a special ability to mask his true stats.”

“Oh, myyy! Is he really? Because it doesn’t look like he’s hiding much to me.”

I look at Lucifer’s face and shudder...because before I even realized it, a third eye had appeared on her forehead while she was staring hard at Seiya.

“He has polished the skill to such a level that it would be impossible to see past it for most. His true stats, however, are even higher than both yours and Eraser’s.”

“Hmph. I’m impressed you were able to see past my Fake Out. It appears she has clairvoyant powers similar to Ishtar’s crystal ball. What a waste.”

Seiya points his blade at Lucifer and declares:

“This is your last chance. Do as I say, Lucifer Crowe.”

“I have grown weary of your ramblings.”

Lucifer holds up her Magic Bow and pulls back an arrow. Seiya braces for an attack, but Lucifer shoots a pitch-black arrow straight into the sky. The clouds split open, and the giant spherical monster covered in eyes emerges.

“S-Seiya! She’s going to use Diablos Rain!”

With her eyes locked on Seiya, Lucifer says in a voice devoid of all emotion:

“I have detected and locked onto every living creature in this town with the exception of us demons.”

This is not good! While Cerceus and I should be able to survive the attack, Seiya is not a deity! Not only that, but...

Nearby are Rosalie and Nina, still seeking comfort in each other's arms. Rosalie looks up at the grotesque monster in the sky and tightly clenches her jaw, knowing there is nothing she can do.

Ahhh! Everyone's going to be killed at this rate! Is there really nothing we can do?

Surely there's only a matter of seconds before Diablos Rain begins. But all of a sudden...

“Impossible...”

Lucifer quietly mutters to herself. When I look over, she is studying the sky, but she's staring in the opposite direction of where she summoned Magic Bow. I follow her gaze, but I can't believe my eyes, either.

“H-how...?!”

Because there is another colossal, sphere-shaped, eye-covered monster in the sky! Seiya casually remarks: “I tried copying your move.”

D-does that mean he Mimicked Diablos Rain and made that while I was worrying about Nina and Rosalie?!

There are two orbs floating overhead. Lucifer's eyes widen for a moment, but the emotion quickly leaves her face again.

“No one can imitate my special move. That must be an illusion of some sort.”

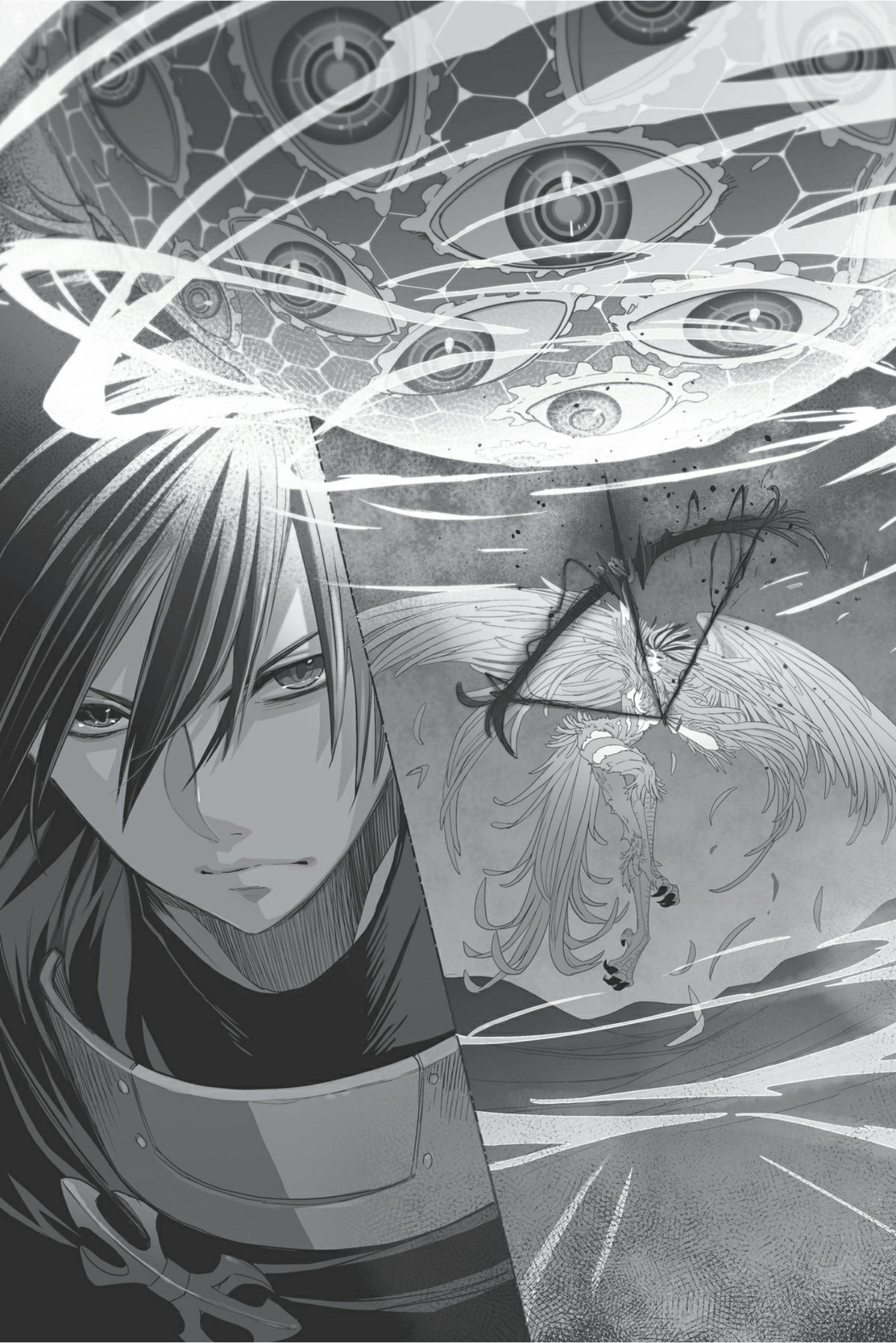
“It is just as you say, Madam Lucifer. Besides, humans cannot even use dark-magic spells, so it is nothing to concern yourself over.”

After Eraser gives her a slight nod in agreement, Lucifer crosses her arms before her chest.

“Fall upon my enemy: Diablos Rain.”

The monster in the eastern part of the sky then explodes, transforming into

countless trails of jet-black light, which rain over the town like missiles when...



“Let me return the favor. Diablos Rain.”

Seiya crosses his arms just like Lucifer, instantly causing the monster in the opposite direction to explode as well. It, too, emits jet-black energy, which pursues Lucifer’s rays. Hundreds of jet-black energy trails coalesce before clashing with a bang.

“A-Amazing! He’s canceling out Lucifer’s Diablos Rain with his own!”

Cerceus shouts in admiration, but I immediately notice something terrifying. A trail of dark energy evaded Seiya’s attack and is rapidly heading straight for Nina and Rosalie!

“Watch out!”

I scream, and Rosalie promptly throws herself over Nina as if to protect her. But right as the dark energy is about to hit Nina, another trail of dark energy sweeps in from the side, crashing into it and canceling it out. Rosalie and Nina fall speechless.

“Thank goodness...!”

I instinctively say, overcome with relief. Seiya glances at me with a “hmph.”

“I didn’t miss any of them. The attack has a one hundred percent interception success rate. I perfectly Mimicked the total number of energy rays that Diablos Rain can produce, after all.”

“R-really?!”

I gulp. It didn’t really hit me when I watched Seiya Mimic that dragonewt’s doppelgänger ability, but this really is the essence of Joker’s Mimic skill! He was able to perfectly imitate a dark skill which humans shouldn’t even be able to learn, then use it to cancel out the original attack! I had no idea Mimic was going to be such an amazing skill!

This almost makes acting like a gorilla and making a fool of myself in the underworld worth it. However, contrary to my carefree expression, Lucifer’s face skews at Seiya.

“He imitated my unique skill Magic Bow? Not even a god can do that.”

“I didn’t learn how to do it from a god but someone from the underworld. More importantly, Lucifer, there is something I need to check.”

“Seiya?! What in the world do you want to check at a time like this?!”

“Lucifer Crowe, I told you a few moments ago to do as I say. I still haven’t gotten an answer from you, though.”

“Seiya...! She answered that when she used Diablos Rain! It’s pretty obvious she’s not interested in cooperating!”

“She didn’t clearly refuse, though.”

Seiya persistently presses Lucifer for an answer.

“Allow me to repeat myself. This is your last, last chance. Do as I say.”

“...I have already told you that I grow weary of your drivel.”

The irritation is plain in Lucifer’s voice. Even I start to feel a little annoyed. Just give it a rest already! You’re not going to convince her! Lucifer has absolutely no interest in ever cooperating with a human!

She simply glares at Seiya with her three eyes while calmly analyzing him.

“You can unconditionally copy any move you see once, regardless of its magic type and form. Hmph. A filthy skill only fit for a thief. Allow me, then, to show you a move which you have never seen before.”

Lucifer begins chanting in an ancient language unfamiliar to me while simultaneously moving her hands in swift, complicated patterns. All of a sudden, distortion appears in the palm of Lucifer’s hand.

O-oh, no! Seiya can’t Mimic skills he has never seen before! He has to either dodge it or block!

But that’s when I notice that Seiya is mumbling something to himself. When I shift my gaze from Lucifer to Seiya, I notice he’s creating a distortion in the air over his palm just like she is.

“But how?! He’s never seen this move before!”

It doesn’t make any sense! More importantly, Lucifer is already pointing her hand toward Seiya!

“Invisible Magic Bow, pierce my foe: Master Wind Arrow.”

‘Invisible’?! Did she literally make that arrow out of thin air?!

Vrrrm. After a dull sound reverberates, I manage to catch a glimpse of the distorted air soaring out of Lucifer’s hand.

“S-Seiya...!”

The invisible attack causes me to panic, but Seiya was already aiming a hand at Lucifer, calm as ever.

“Master Wind Arrow.”

The instant Seiya utters those words, the space between them greatly distorts! The blast from the two invisible arrows colliding is so strong that I can hardly stand. As I’m fighting against the wind, though, it all makes sense.

So that’s how he does it! If it’s a magic spell that you chant before using, he can Mimic the spell and movement before it’s even cast!

Chaos Machina seems to be just as astounded as I am by Seiya’s Mimicking skills. “Wh-what is the meaning of this?! It’s like she’s looking into a mirror! Lucifer...!”

“Calm yourself, Chaos Machina. It may be an unusual skill, but it does not have the power to damage me. He is merely crudely imitating my skills enough to defend against them.”

Overhearing their conversation, Seiya mutters:

“I *am* wasting too much MP Mimicking your skills, so I suppose I’ll just fight normally now.”

“A-are you okay, Seiya?! I remember that Mimic takes a lot of MP, but...!”

“I only have enough MP left to use Hellfire a few thousand times now.”

“That’s plenty, dammit! You’ve barely lost any MP!!”

Nevertheless, Seiya himself seems concerned as he gets back into a fighting stance with his sword and faces Lucifer.

“And that’s why I plan on ending this quickly if it’s all the same to you.”

“You finally plan on attacking? Unfortunately for you, without your Mimicry, you’re nothing.”

Lucifer already saw through Seiya’s Fake Out ability and knows his real stats. That’s probably why she seems so confident. But in the very next moment, Seiya’s hair and eyes begin to glow a darkish red. After transforming into a berserker, he instantly closes the distance and swings his sword. Although Lucifer blocks it with her long claws, she cannot hide her surprise.

“Your stats have more than doubled...!”

Flustered, she flaps her wings and tries to escape into the sky, but Seiya uses Flight and promptly pursues her. Perhaps feeling she would have an advantage in an aerial battle, he immediately slashes his sword vertically in a downward motion. Lucifer crosses her arms to block, but it knocks her back down to the surface and forces her to drop to her knees.

“What is this power...? This speed...?”

After blocking yet another attack, Lucifer’s arm begins to smolder, because before anyone had realized it, Seiya imbued his sword with fire magic. He’s using a magic sword as a berserker—something that should have been impossible.

After experiencing Seiya’s power firsthand, Lucifer Crowe casts aside her composed, majestic facade and makes her bloodlust clear.

“You... You are a threat that must be dealt with!”

Her mouth suddenly opens wide, slit from ear to ear, exposing countless razor-sharp teeth inside. Her eyes turn pitch-black, and her hair stands on end.

“Sh-she’s finally showing her true nature! Seiya, be careful!”

The mask of a beautiful woman is now nothing more than the face of a hideous demon. However, Seiya doesn’t even feign surprise as he speaks in his usual tone:

“Lucifer Crowe, this is your last, ultimate, final chance. Do as I say.”

“How many chances are you going to give her?! What kind of demon would help you after all that?!”

Of course, Lucifer has no plans to obey Seiya, and she immediately charges right for him with murder in her eyes.

“I am going to swallow you whole!”

“So that’s your answer... Too bad.”

Seiya really does sound disappointed, and I start to worry as I watch.

“Seiya! Don’t let your guard down!”

He might go easy on her if he really is regretting the fact that it came to this! But being careless like that could cost him his life! However, in the end...my worries are all for nothing. Seiya suddenly shoots Lucifer a piercing gaze.

“If you aren’t going to join me, then I’ll use my full power to destroy you.”

He unsheathes the second sword at his waist, which he purchased in the underworld, then engages the enemy with the force of a surging wave. She screeches like a harpy while swinging her razor-sharp claws at Seiya, but he blocks them with dual swords and pushes her away. The sounds of claws violently clashing against blades reverberate. As Seiya dodges her strike by a thin margin, his swords faintly graze her body.

Despite not using her Magic Bow, she’s keeping up with berserker Seiya in close combat! No, if anything, she’s...!

Though Seiya is pressing the attack, he isn’t getting a single clean hit on her. Lucifer, on the other hand, is going only for his vitals, and each of her strikes is precise. She tries to sink her claws into Seiya’s heart, but he bends to the side, barely managing to evade.

“Seiya...!”

His swordsmanship is nowhere as smooth as it usually is! He’s leaving only small cuts on her!

Sensing that Seiya is losing the battle, my body begins to violently tremble, and Cerceus is shaking even more. Uncontrollably so.

“Brrr! It’s cold!”

“...?”

That's when it hits me. My breath is white! I-is the temperature actually dropping?! Wait! Is that...?!

When I look back over, both of Lucifer's arms have already frozen over from blocking Seiya's attack. She contorts her face in anguish as her limp arms dangle at her sides. Seiya then points the tips of his swords at her as a frigid air rises from the blades.

"Frigid restraints: Fenrir Beat."

The demons are buzzing. Even Eraser grunts:

"A-an ice magic sword?! But I thought his magic affinity was fire!"

I don't blame Eraser for being startled. Not only can Seiya Mimic even demonic skills, but he can also use a magic sword that's opposite his natural type, which transcends magic theory itself. The moves of the underworld are outside the realm of understanding for both demons and us deities. During their exchange earlier, I felt as if Lucifer had the upper hand, but I was wrong.

Seiya wasn't getting a clean hit on Lucifer because he was losing control of his body when using his opposite magic type outside of the underworld. His precision and hit rate decreased, but his magic power increased exponentially. Lucifer's body is covered in fine cuts from Fenrir Beat. Ice begins to appear over each wound until her body is frozen in ice.

"Ah...gu...!"

Lucifer tries to say something, but even her head is immediately swallowed in ice.

"She might have been able to shoot magic arrows out of her eyes and mouth, so I decided to freeze every last part of her just in case."

Seiya casually mentions this as he slowly approaches the crystallized demon.

"Ice magic excels in binding force, but it's a poor choice for delivering the final blow. Something with more destructive power like fire magic should do the trick."

Seiya deeply inhales in front of Lucifer, who can no longer move or even talk.

"Mode: Double Eternal Sword EX Phoenix Drive."

As Seiya freely swings his fiery swords through the ice, a geometric pattern in the shape of a crimson magic circle appears before it. With his berserker-enhanced speed, he creates a dozen magic circles around Lucifer in the blink of an eye. After the patterns almost instantly vanish, they are followed by a blast wave coupled with a radiant light, instantly thawing Lucifer's frozen body as it turns into fine pieces of charred flesh, which scatter about.

H-he defeated Lucifer Crowe...? And he did it without even breaking a sweat?!

Cerceus immediately throws himself at the feet of the Hero while rubbing his hands together.

"W-wow, Seiya! That was amazing! Clearly, you never even needed Lucifer's help in the first place!"

"Lucifer's Magic Bow was perfectly suited for assassinations. Even if the Dragon Lord killed her, she still could have done some damage. I would have an easier time defeating a weakened Dragon Lord."

No wonder he was so persistent in trying to get Lucifer to join us. He was trying to increase his odds against the Dragon Lord. This is the kind of caution I've come to expect from Seiya, now that I think about it.

As I feel content in my understanding, Seiya says with a straight face:

"Fortune decides the outcome of battle. One may still lose even if they are far stronger than their opponent due to various factors such as the environment or one's condition, even. There is one thing that remains true no matter what, however."

"Um... What's that?"

"You never lose if you don't fight."

"Obviously!"

"At any rate, I failed in getting Lucifer to join our side. I'll have to start thinking about new ways to convince the demons to join us."

"H-how about we not cooperate with *any* demons?"

While I can't help but roll my eyes, I am finally at ease, as is Cerceus. However, the demons around us begin murmuring excitedly.

“Surround them!”

Numerous demons surround us at Eraser’s command. Cerceus gets scared, but the demons just stand there. It’s only natural for them to be afraid after what happened to Lucifer. Seiya turns his distant gaze in Eraser’s direction.

“You can’t always predict the outcome of a battle, but the possibility of you defeating me is nearly nonexistent.”

Chaos Machina uncharacteristically shows panic and yells:

“W-we could still defeat you if every demon in town attacks you all at once! Besides, I still have a trick up my sleeve. I can—”

“Slicing your stomach open and pushing out your true bovine self isn’t going to change anything.”

“Eeeeeek! How did you know about that?!”

Seiya quickly surveys each and every demon with his swords still unsheathed.

“Back off or die.”

“...!”

Both Eraser and Chaos Machina step back, intimidated by Seiya’s spirit. Rosalie and Nina are still collapsed on the ground nearby. Even as Seiya keeps a watchful eye on the demons, Rosalie gawks in disbelief.

“The legendary monster Lucifer Crowe was utterly helpless against him...! Why...? How did he defeat her?! How did an ordinary human defeat her without relying on demonic power!”

I then say to Rosalie:

“That’s because he isn’t any ordinary human. He’s a one-in-a-billion man of talent who works hard and prepares for any and every outcome.”

I hear Rosalie audibly gulp.

“So this is the power of the Hero chosen by the gods! He’s the Salvific Hero!”

“Um... Not exactly.”

After running the demons off, Seiya deploys a few dozen Automatic

Phoenixes. He then takes his swords and begins to collect Lucifer's charred remains. And just as always, he starts using Hellfire on each and every one of them.

"Wh-what is he doooing?!"

"Wh-what is wrong with that human?!"

Even the cunning Chaos Machina and seasoned warrior Eraser stop in their tracks, taken aback by Seiya's bizarre behavior. While watching the fire performance, I smile at Rosalie as she remains stunned on the ground.

"That's just business as usual for the Cautious Hero."

AFTERWORD

Tuchihi here. First, I would like to thank everyone who picked up this book. Currently, the *Cautious Hero* anime is being broadcast on TV, and the second volume of the manga has just come out. I'm sure there are more than a few people here who have just learned about this series through the anime or manga. By the way, the anime version of this series is called *Cautious Hero*, but the title of the light novels is *The Hero Is Overpowered but Overly Cautious*. I know. It's long. Anyone who wishes to know what happens after the anime or manga, please feel free to give the light novels a read.

Anyway, let's talk about what happened in this volume. The warped Gaeabrande arc has finally begun. Rista's life has been turned upside down, and Seiya's morbid cautiousness proves to be even worse than usual. I really hope you enjoy the tale of Seiya and Rista (and one more character) as they journey to a new parallel-universe-style world.

Once again, Saori Toyota drew the wonderful illustrations in this book. I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the publishing of this book as well. While I'm here, I'd also like to thank WHITE FOX for their work on the anime and Koyuki for illustrating the comics. Until we meet again.

Light Tuchihi

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